FROM HEMEL HEMPSTEAD TO STOWMARKET THE LONG WAY ROUND

Via India and Africa

BY

PAT SMITH

My life so far from 1924 to 1983

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I have written this for Jennifer, Gillian and Philip and my grandchildren. I dedicate this with love to Jean who was my friend and unfailing support for 58 years. Thanks to her love for us all, and her patience, hard work and determination over many years she made our lives in Rhodesia very special.

Pat Smith

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PAT SMITH - MY STORY
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INTRODUCTION

In 1929 if you had walked into our house, 15 Corner Hall, Hemel Hempstead. The overall appearance would have been that of a typical 1920's working class dwelling. The furniture, most of which was inherited, perhaps passed down is the more correct phrase, was plain and for that period reasonably comfortable. The general feeling that you got was that this was a tidy family with everything in its place, you would, however, have been very much mistaken. We were in fact a rather disorderly family. If you opened the cupboards all manner of things used to fall out and to find something seemed to take all day. Behind cupboard doors, in an old oak chest in the hall way, and in one small sideboard drawer there lurked aspects of disorder.

From the pavement up four stone steps was the front door with its large knocker opening into a smallish hallway. Against the right hand wall of the hall was an antique chest made of highly polished planks of oak. The lid was heavy and difficult for me as a child to lift. It was know as the coffer. The inside was lined with old faded newspapers, which dated from the early 1800's. If you knelt down, put your head inside, and turned it slightly you could read news of the battle of Trafalgar. I didn't think of this as anything out of the ordinary, it was just something that has always been there.

The contents of the coffer were something to behold - a jumbled heap of old unrelated items. Stiff collars that once belonged to shirts long since discarded, moth eaten scarves and knitted gloves with holes in the fingers and several old ties. There was a black silk Victorian cape embroidered with hundreds of black beads and lined with a maroon material that had a fascinating pattern that appeared to change colour as you moved it. I think it was called "Shot Silk. " It had once belonged to my great grandmother and, so I was told, was worn by her to Church on Sunday mornings. Its richness had long since disappeared. My brother John and I used it for dressing up. There were bundles of old letters tied up with string and a couple of tattered photograph albums. There was even an old fur collar that, I think, once belonged to my Mother, as well as a couple of broken umbrellas. Above the coffer was a row of pegs hung with coats and jackets, hats and scarves. Not only the ones we wore each day but also others, which to my small boy's mind, had been there forever. My parents never threw anything out.

There was a cupboard under the stairs which housed the gas meter which was fed with one shilling pieces, but far more interesting was an assortment of curious oddments that I believe had once made up the parts of a home made wireless set. A large metal hook hung from a nail hammered into the wall holding old receipts some for my Mother's wedding dress and going away outfit and some for bits of furniture originally bought for the house.

In front of you as you stood in the hallway was a door, which opened into the living room, which we called the kitchen. Here in the bottom drawer of an old sideboard there was a smaller version of the accumulation of useless oddments that were found in the coffer and under the stairs. This drawer contained a hoard of bits and pieces, which could only be classed as memorabilia or really just junk. On wet afternoons when I had nothing better to do, I enjoyed tipping the contents on to the floor and looking through them. There were old sepia photographs of relations long gone, curious bits of material, forgotten buttons by the dozen that were intended at sometime to have been sewn back onto garments. Several well battered thimbles, a small cracked plate, (what was it being saved for?) empty cotton reels and an old pincushion minus any pins. There were odd bits of paper with addresses written on them in pencil, and something I always enjoyed looking at - my Mother's and Father's wedding photograph taken in the garden of my grandfather's house at 1, Cotterells, Hemel Hempstead. But most intriguing of all was a curved band of white wax flowers, buds and artificial leaves that I was told was orange blossom. Only years later did I come to realise that this was something that must have been worn by my Mother as part of her bridal head-dress on her wedding day the 19th of May 1923.

This is the kind of environment that I grew up in and which influenced my early years. Read on to find out how my life progressed over the next 50 odd years or so.

I REMEMBER

Memory is fickle and my memory is no exception. Often the unpleasant somehow becomes censored and is not easily recalled whilst the happy times are easily remembered. What follows therefore is a mixture of both though with a lot more of the pleasant than the unpleasant as life has been very good to me.

Like everyone I have a story to tell so I am going to invite you to come with me back in time. I hope to tell you a little of my life, where I came from and those who were my family and friends. The whole of the action for the first nineteen years of my life took place in and around Hemel Hempstead in the county of Hertfordshire.

My story begins before I was born in 1922, or thereabouts, as that is the year that my parents first met.

My father, William Edward Montague Smith, was born on the 9th April 1899 at Watford. He was known to all as Ted and was a salesman for a firm of wine merchants called Baldersons. Their premises were at No. 17 Corner Hall (now Lawn Lane)". Ted lived next door at No. 15 with his widowed grandmother, Grandma Higgins. He was just over six feet tall with dark curly hair. He had seen a little of the world having served in France with the Kings Royal Rifle Corps during the last half of the First World War. From an early age he had lived at Bourne End in a small village between Hemel Hempstead and Berkhampsted where his Grandfather and Grandmother brought him up. He returned from service in France after the end of the war to live with them in Winkwell where his grandfather Higgins worked on the Pouchen End Estate. On Sundays Ted would attend the village church of St John's in Bourne End to open it and get it ready for services and assist as a sidesman. By all accounts he was sought after by the girls. Young ladies who lived in nearby Boxmoor would often stroll out on Sunday evenings during the summer to attend Evensong at St John's. My mother, Eleanor Mary Johnson, known as Nell, and her friend Doll Attwood decided to visit

Ted Smith and Nellie Johnson Engagement 1923.

one Sunday evening. I suspect that they had heard of the attractive young man who helped there.

Nell was born on the 10th October 1899 at the family home, which was then in the area of Hemel Hempstead known as Paradise. After school in Boxmoor she worked as a secretary at John Dickinson's factory in Apsley and lived with her parents, William and Alice Johnson at No1 Cotterells just near the Heath Park Hotel. Nell was tall with dark hair and as fashionable as her wages would allow. She had an older sister Phyllis (Phyll) who was married to Clifford Jordan. They had a little girl, Joyce.

As you have probably guessed by now the inevitable happened and Ted and Nell became friends. Ted was the proud owner of a motor cycle as was his friend Bernard Clamp. When weather permitted the two young men together with their girl friends Nell and Cissie ventured out on their motor cycles beyond the confines of Boxmoor often as far afield as Marlow on Thames where old photographs show them relaxing on the banks of the river. Ted and Nell were married on Saturday the 19th May 1923 at St John's Boxmoor. This is how the event was reported in the Hemel Hempstead Gazette of the following week. -

> *"A very pretty wedding took place in St John's Church, Boxmoor on Saturday last, between Eleanor Mary, youngest daughter of Mr and Mrs W Johnson of 1 Cottrells and William Edward Montague Smith only son of Mrs Pearce and the late Mr W Smith of Watford. The bride, who was given away by her father was charmingly attired in ivory crepe de chine and was attended by Miss C Reeve (friend) Miss C Smith (sister of the bridegroom) and Miss Joyce Jordan (niece of the bride) the duties of best man were ably carried out by Mr Bernard Clamp. The church service which was fully choral was conducted by the Rev G A C Smith. In addition to the guests quite a number of friends of the bride and bridegroom attended the service and joined in the singing of the two hymns "Lead us Heavenly Father and the Voice that breathed o'er Eden". The procession of the bride and bridegroom from the church was accompanied by the Wedding March rendered by Mr Douglas Jones at the organ. The bride carried a bouquet of arum lilies the gift of Mrs Smeathman. After the service the reception was held at the home of the bride. Later in the afternoon the happy couple left for Clacton where the honeymoon is being spent. The presents were both valuable and Numerous. "*

After the honeymoon the couple returned to set up home at No. 15 Corner Hall (today No. 64 Lawn Lane). Prior to his wedding Ted had rented the house, which belonged to his employers, and had moved in with Grandma Higgins to look after him. After the wedding Grandma stayed on. And so Ted and Nell began married life. Nell must have really loved him for not only had she a new husband but also a new Grandmother.

Sometime in early 1924 the newlyweds found that they were to become parents. On the 19th September of that year a little boy was born in the Princess Mary ward of the West Herts Hospital. Later in the same year he was christened William Patrick at St John's Church Boxmoor. William was chosen as a family name and Patrick because Nell thought it was a lovely name for a boy.

Ted and Pat, 1925

Pat with Donkey, 1925

THE YEARS 1924-1930

I was brought home to 15 Corner Hall where I lived and grew up until I left 18 years later. To this day the outside of the house hasn't changed much. It still looks much the same as it always did. I remember it as a very quiet road. Until the middle of the 1930's, opposite the house, were the grounds

of a large estate, the house of which had long since disappeared. My father knew the owners of the land and looked after an electric generator, which still existed in what was left of the outbuildings. He was allowed to keep several hives of bees on the vacant land. These were his pride and joy and provided us with honey. Cars were not a common sight in those days but we did see occasional buses as they went past on their way to St Albans. There was no pavement in front of the house and you stepped straight from the house onto the road.

On opening the front door you came into a small hallway with the stairs going up to a large landing. In front of you was the door to the living room and to your left the sitting room. This was furnished with an old piano that Nell had brought with her when she married, a sofa and two easy chairs, and a bookcase full of old books. An old carpet covered the floor. On the wall facing you as you entered the room was a large rather depressing oil painting of an impending storm. It had been given to my Father, probably by someone who didn't like it. Father thought it was wonderful so it stayed. One feature of the room was the large wooden shutters that were pushed over the two windows at night. A single gas light hung from the centre of the ceiling.

The living room, or as we called it the kitchen, had a gate-leg table whose leaves folded down to make more room and an old sideboard which my great grandmother had brought with her when she came to live. Two wooden easy chairs under whose cushions were tucked newspapers and magazines and four dining chairs. Near the window which looked out onto the back garden was a small bamboo table on, which was a wireless set, powered by two batteries. One of the batteries was a dry battery which was for the high voltage part of the wireless set and the other was known as an accumulator. This was filled with acid and needed to be charged up each week. This was done at the garage where my father subsequently worked. Quite often when there was a programme being broadcast that we wanted to listen to the battery was flat as Father had forgotten to take it to get charged. The floor of the living room was covered in brown lino with a small rug in front of the cooking range which was made from cast iron and had a coal fire. It was blackened each week to keep it looking smart. It was used for all mother's baking and was the sole heating for the house except on Sundays when fire was lit in the front room. The lighting in the living room consisted of a single gaslight fixed to the wall. This and

the light in the sitting room were the only forms of lighting for the whole of the house.

The window in the living room (kitchen) looked out on to a small garden with a washing line and a few struggling plants that grew in the shadow of a brick wall over which could be seen the house next door. This was much grander one than ours - an old Georgian house that stood in its own grounds. Leading off from the living room was a short passage with a black and red tiled stone floor. The back door was to the right. Opposite the back door was an intriguing room known as "The Dark Place". It was a kind of storeroom inside the house. It was always full of old coats and other useless junk, which was added to over the years, none of which ever appeared to be thrown away.

At the end of the passage was the scullery where most of the cooking was done on an old black gas stove rented from the local gas company. Under the window, which looked out onto a small concrete yard, was an old stone sink in which the washing up was done and in which we all washed in the mornings. Above the sink was a cold tap, any hot water needed had to be boiled in a kettle on the gas stove. There was no heating in the scullery so it was a bitterly cold affair getting washed on a winter morning often with ice still on the inside of the window. You turned down the collar of your shirt and quickly washed your face with a damp flannel. We cleaned our teeth with something called Gibbs Dentifrice. Having a bath was hard work as the scullery also doubled as the bathroom. On Friday nights (in the winter every other Friday!) a tin bath would be brought in from the back yard and placed on the floor. Meanwhile buckets of water would be heating on the gas stove. When ready my brother and I would undress as quickly as possible and jump into the bath. Whoever got there first had the clean water, otherwise you shared it. To dry yourself you would wrap a towel around you and run shivering into the living room to be rubbed down in front of the fire. Your pyjamas would be warming on the fireguard. How Mother and Father had their baths I never found out. I don't think I ever saw my Father without his clothes on.

The weekly wash took place on Monday mornings in the wash house across the yard opposite the kitchen. Inside was a copper that was filled with pails of water from the tap in the kitchen. Mother lit a fire under the copper to boil the water some of which, when heated, was taken out to fill a tin bath that stood on a table. Mother would stand there for most of the morning up to her arms in soapsuds (no washing powder) rubbing the

clothes on a washing board. The sheets, pillowcases and any white articles would be placed in the copper to boil. All the washing would be put through a mangle with large wooden rollers that squeezed out the surplus water before being hung out to dry. During this time Mother would also have to prepare the dinner for half past twelve when father came home from work and we came home from school. The meal invariably consisted of cold meat left over from Sunday's roast, cabbage and potatoes cooked in their jackets in the fire under the copper. Possibly for afters there was anything left over from Sunday dinner or a hastily cooked rice pudding.

Upstairs there were three bedrooms. Mother and Father had the one at front. My brother John and I shared one of the rooms at the back of the house, or sometimes we had one each depending on the state of our relationship with each other. The only means of lighting upstairs was by candle so you couldn't see much and it was difficult to read in bed which I loved to do. We were fortunate as our house had an inside lavatory whilst our neighbours had theirs outside which must have been daunting places to visit on a cold winter's night. There was no heating upstairs at all and even when there was frost and snow on the ground it was considered healthy to have the bedroom windows open. On winter mornings there would often be ice on the inside of the window panes. When going to bed I would take a stone (ceramic) hot water bottle with me in an old sock which acted as a cover. If it was very cold indeed I kept your vest and pants on and my socks as well.

EARLY MEMORIES

The earliest memory that I have is visiting my maternal grandmother Grandma Johnson at 1 Cottrells. I plainly remember being given a biscuit from a jar that came from a cupboard which was beside the fireplace in the kitchen, but that is all I can recollect. Sadly Grandma died from pneumonia in December 1926

My father's mother lived in a row of cottages called the Flint Cottages about a quarter of a mile from us at the top of what was known as Albion Hill. This led down over the Grand Union Canal to Apsley. I was the only grandchild at the time. I used to spend a great deal of time with Grandma, especially when my mother was expecting my brother at the beginning of 1927. Consequently I was very spoilt. Grandma had a very large family by her second husband, who by the time I came along had died. There was Aunt Con, my father's sister, then Father's half sister Doris, and his

half brothers - Alec, Victor, known as Son, Charlie, John and Albert. Whether they all lived at home in this small three bedroom cottage I cannot remember. Everyone called Grandma Mum and I being very small and copying them also called her Mum and did so for the remainder of her life. She had a lovely old ginger cat that she used to let me dress up. We had a wedding one-day in which he married my teddy bear. There was Ovaltine in front of the fire and records on the wind up gramophone that had a doll in the centre, which went round and round as the records played. There were always sticky buns for tea and toast with dripping.

Life at 15 Corner Hall was happy. Great Grandma Higgins lived with us. I remember her well. She was a tiny lady always dressed in black. She slept in the bedroom at the top of the stairs. For best she wore a black satin cape embroidered with little black beads which ended up in the coffer in the hall. After she died we children used it for dressing up. She often used to read to me. One summer's afternoon she took me to see my grandmother Mum as I used to call her. Mum had now moved to a larger house in Ebberns Road, just down the hill from the flint cottage. This house backed onto the Grand Union Canal. I was not yet at school so I must have been about four. As we came in sight of the house Grandma Higgins said "Pat my legs do feel wobbly" the next thing I knew she had collapsed in the road and people were crowding around her. I ran home clutching the little boat that I was going to sail on the canal. I sat on the doorstep crying and waiting for my mother to come home from shopping. Granny Higgins must have died soon afterwards because we opened her tin trunk that had been kept in the ' Dark Place' What an anticlimax the opening of the trunk was. It was always kept securely locked with a large padlock. All it contained was a large oval cracked plate and nothing else. Granny Higgins was

Alice and William Johnson
Silver Wedding circa 1920

a lovely lady. Sometimes on a Saturday afternoon Aunt Con would take me with her to put flowers on her grave. Saturday afternoon was a special afternoon for Aunt Con because she had a half-day off from work. She worked at the John Dickinson factory in Apsley, as did many people from Hemel Hempstead and often took me with her on the bus to Watford. I seem to remember if it was fine we sat on the top which in those days was open.

On the 5th April 1927 my brother John Malcom was born. Memory is likely to play tricks with me here because I vaguely remember that very rarely did we get on together. Possibly I wonder whether it was because, deep down I resented his coming along and becoming the centre of attention instead of me. I don't know. From early on we shared the same bedroom. When we were old enough, probably when I was about 6 or 7 years old, we used to listen to the wireless at teatime. At five o'clock it was Children's Hour hosted by Uncle Mac. There was just the one BBC station in those days. Our favourite programme was one about the adventures of a character called Larry the Lamb and the inhabitants of Toy Town. The Noddy of that time. Before we went to sleep at night I used to pretend to transport ourselves to Toy Town and relive the stories with the sound effects that we had heard. So perhaps we did get on!

'In 1930 just after his 3rd birthday John suffered a rather unpleasant accident. Granddad Johnson (Mother's father), who was still living at 1 Cottrells, had remarried not long after Grandma Johnson's death. The marriage was to a lady we called Aunt Ella. She had been a lodger at the house for several years. She not welcomed by either my mother or Aunt Phyll as she was a domineering rather unfriendly sort of person and was certainly not fond of children. She did change a little later on though but she never really liked us as small children. Aunt Ella was ill at the time. She suffered badly from asthma. Mother had gone to the house to do the washing. There were no washing machines in those days. Sheets were boiled in a copper in the washhouse, which was outside. Before the washing was hung out to dry, excess water was squeezed out by putting it through a mangle which consisted of two heavy wooden rollers connected at both ends by metal cogs one of which had a large cast iron wheel attached to it which turned the rollers. Mother was busy putting some sheets through the mangle when John ran in from outside, slipped on the wet stone floor and put out his hand to save himself catching the thumb of his left hand in the unprotected cogs of the mangle. The result was the

loss of his thumb. This proved to be the turning point in his life. Several operations at the West Herts Hospital followed to repair the damage to his hand but tragically one of them went wrong and he suffered, which I realised in later life, to be brain damage. From then onwards and for the remainder of his life (he died in 1971) he suffered from asthma and from eczema and of course learning difficulties. As I grew up he became less and less part of my life until we became virtual strangers. On reflection perhaps I should have made a greater effort to get to know him and to understand his problems, but at the time I didn't see it that way.

OUR HEALTH DURING THE EARLY YEARS

I was fortunate as a young boy and had very little wrong with me. As far as I can remember I had all the usual childhood diseases, chickenpox, measles and whooping cough. These were common in those days, as there was no immunisation against them. I must have been quite ill when I had the measles as I can recall our family doctor coming to see me in bed. He often used to come to the house to see John, my brother, who suffered badly from asthma and eczema. As I approached puberty I suffered from boils on the back of my neck and mother took me to the doctor's surgery. There were no appointments you just used to have to go the surgery in Marlowes and sit and wait your turn. This evening we went in to Doctor Jonas's consulting room and after a look at the back of my neck he handed me an enamel jug and asked me to go the lavatory and make some water. I was puzzled and came back to him and asked how I was supposed to do it? He said in a stern voice "pee boy pee! ". Mother was very embarrassed. How was I supposed to know what the doctor meant? This remained a family joke for many years. We were all very active walking to school and back twice a day in all weathers. It must have been half a mile or so each way. There were sessions in the gym twice a week and in the winter cross county running. So all in all we kept fairly fit and didn't have much chance to get fat. Generally speaking, except for John whose condition was accepted, we were a healthy family. Father never seemed to ail; if he did he didn't show it. The only time I can remember my Mother being ill and confined to bed was when she had quinsy – this was a kind of apses that developed in the throat and in some cases became so swollen that it blocked the throat and often proved fatal. We children were not allowed into the bedroom and everyone was whispering. Grandma came to put us to bed in the evenings and told us not to worry. The doctor visited several times going upstairs with his large black bag. With the aid of some kind

of poultice the apses finally broke and Mother quickly recovered and was back to her household duties. For coughs and colds we relied on having to have our chests rubbed with camphorated oil and inhaling Friars Balsam. That was about all the remedies there were. We survived despite the lack of central heating and draught-proof houses. We were lucky and always ate well and in our house there was always honey for tea.

THE TALE OF GRANNIE HIGGINS – THE SECRET BOX

Granny Higgins, as we called her, lived with us until I was about six years old. She was a tiny old lady who as far as I can make out must have been in her mid seventies at the time. She dressed in long black skirts and on Sundays, when she went to church, wore a silk cape embroidered with black beads and a matching bonnet. Granny Higgins was my great grandmother on my father's side. I won't go into why she was living with us as that is another story. She often used to read to us and in the summer would sit in the garden with our old Airedale at her side. She loved being outside in the fresh air as most of her life had been spent in the country. That is all I can really remember of her except that I was with her the afternoon she had the stroke that ended her life. Mother had gone shopping and Granny was taking me to sail my new boat on the canal behind my grandmother's house. The house was situated on a gravel road and as we approached it she whispered to me that she thought her legs were "going funny" The next thing I recollect is that she was lying crumpled up on the road like a small doll, her bag her hat and my precious boat scattered around her. I was so frightened and bewildered that I ran back home and sat crying on the front doorstep awaiting my Mother's return from the High Street.

It was generally known amongst the family that Granny Higgins had a secret box that was kept locked and hidden away. It was, so we believed, secreted in a most peculiar room in our house. The room was off the passage that led from our living room to the kitchen, or as we called it the scullery. We always called this particular room The "Dark Place" for the obvious reason that it had no windows and no light. At that time we only had two gas lights in the whole of the house. It was a scary place and we children avoided it as much as we could. It was full of old coats and hats that hung on pegs just inside the entrance. There were also several decrepit tea chests full of what I think of now as rubbish, as well as a collection of worn out brooms. In the dim light you could just make out a shelf filled with old jam jars. The whole place was festooned with spider's webs. The room didn't have floor boards like the rest of the house but had earth instead, the same sort as you find in the garden. The brushes we used for cleaning shoes were kept just inside the doorway. When they were needed we grabbed them as quickly as we possibly could and ran to the scullery. There was always a lingering musty damp smell about the room which seemed to come out at you every time you passsed. To me it was a place of mystery. I was sure that there must be someone or something horrible buried there. As far as I knew

neither Father nor Mother ever ventured inside. One thing for sure though we knew from the talk of our relatives that somewhere in "The Dark Place " was hidden Granny Higgins' secret box. My brother and I often used to lay awake at night and talk about what the box must hold. Were there jewels and gold inside with pieces of eight like a pirates hoard and bags of money to make us rich? We frightened ourselves by talking of the ghosts that lived in there who would grab you if you went inside and make you disappear for ever under the pile of old coats and cobwebs.

After a respectable length of time, however long that was, with Granny Higgins now safely buried; the time had come to open the box. One Sunday evening after everyone had returned from Evensong, Mother, Father and all the Aunts and Uncles gathered in the living room fortified by glasses of port wine. A blanket was produced to cover the table and armed with a torch Father ventured into "The Dark Place "to get THE BOX. My brother John and I nervously looked in and after much banging and one or two angry words from Father, which we did not understand; he emerged covered in dust carrying a battered tin trunk whose lid was fastened by a large rusty padlock.

With due reverence, the trunk was placed on the living room table. A dustpan and brush was found and the dust of many years removed. Most of the paint had peeled off but you could just make out the name Miss Annie Hearne on the lid. No key was found when Granny's bits and pieces were sorted out, and the only way to get inside the box was to break the padlock. Uncle Victor was despatched to find a hammer. There was no need for it though as with just a sharp tap the lock fell open. There was a rasping noise as the lid was opened and the rusty hinges gave way. Everyone held their breath. My brother John and I stood on dining room chairs to get a better view. There were no gold sovereigns, no family jewels, no hidden will, nothing but a very old, very shabby, very large cracked meat platter with a faded willow pattern, the sort used for carving the joint on Sundays. There were surprisingly no groans of disappointment, just looks of amusement on everyone's faces, after all what could you have expected a poor old lady who had worked hard all her life to leave.

It was a bit of excitement for a Sunday evening anyway. The kettle was put on, cold beef and pickle sandwiches made and we children packed off to bed. So much for the mystery of Granny Higgins' secret box. I wonder did she look down and laugh. I like to think so!"

(This really did happen - I have fictionalised it just a little bit!)

SCHOOL DAYS: 1929 - 1940

I started school at Two Waters Infants School at the beginning of September 1929, just before I was 5 years old. My first teacher was Miss Cutler. A sweet patient lady who taught me the alphabet. The classroom had all the letters around the wall with coloured pictures. Other teachers I remember there were Miss Webb, who was in charge and Miss Owen. Sometime during the first weeks at school I ran home during the morning but was taken back ready for the afternoon session by my father on the crossbar of his bicycle. I remember my first appearance on stage in a school concert held in Boxmoor Hall at Christmas time. I took part as a pixie dressed all in green. Miss Webb lent over to fix my costume I remember seeing all the hairs on her face and her rather large cleavage. Another memory from those early years at school was of the whole class being taken out one morning in 1930 into the playground to watch the new wonder of the time, the airship R101. She flew low over the school her great silver hull glinting in the sunshine. I had seen her once before when my father took me with Uncle Clifford, Aunt Phill's husband, to Cardington where she was moored to a mast. It was shortly after this that the airship had a fatal crash in France on her maiden voyage to India.

I progressed in time to the Two Waters Elementary School, which was next door. The only friend that I can remember having during this time was Jim Cheshire who lived in Seaton Road on a council estate not far from us in Corner Hall. We used to walk home together in the afternoons after school. His father was a road sweeper and it was rumoured that his mother was a gypsy. She was very dark skinned and always wore her hair in plaits. My mother always felt sorry for Jim as she said the family was very poor. We certainly didn't have much money either but she used to pass some of my old clothes on to him. Quite a few years ago I happened to meet Jim for the first time in 40 years and he recalled how once, after we had been on holiday, I brought him back a stick of rock, something he had never seen before. In the mornings, at playtime, some of us who had

Pat aged 11

a little pocket money used to hurry down to Weston's Bakery which was nearby to buy a glass of hot milk and sometimes a doughnut covered in sugar. All for two pence. We just had time to devour it before the bell rang. The only teachers I can remember at the school were Mr Gurr the headmaster and a Mrs Edmunds who rode to school from Hillfield Road on her upright bicycle with her handbag in the basket on the front.

I must have been about 10 years old when a heavy parcel arrived at home. I was very excited as I watched my father carefully unwrap it. Inside was a large cardboard box. As Daddy, as I called him, opened the box all I could see were ten beautiful thick books with blue covers with the titles printed in gold letters. I loved books, the only ones I had seen so far were those in the bookcase in the front room, which I often took out to look at and try and read. These, however, were different from anything I had ever seen before. They were a brand new set of Arthur Mee's Children's Encyclopaedia all ten volumes. They were pure magic and introduced me to things that I had never heard of or imagined. There was poetry by famous poets, especially Shakespeare, reproductions of famous paintings in colour, pictures of famous sculptures, illustrations and articles about far away countries, wonderful tales from history and many other famous classical stories. There were explanations and diagrams showing how things worked and so much more. By the time I came to the end of my school days they were well worn. They had been my constant companions for so many enjoyable hours. They taught me the joy of reading, to appreciate art, to love poetry and indirectly to understand music, and to know about countries other than my own. I must have spent hours just looking through those ten volumes which took me far beyond the confines of Hemel Hempstead. I began to explore the bookcase in the front room with more interest and found books by Dickens which moved me intensely, especially Oliver Twist and David Copperfield.

Shortly after Easter 1935 I was chosen by the school to sit an examination at the new Hemel Hempstead Grammar School which is in Heath Lane, not far from St John's Church Boxmoor. Shortly after taking the examination which I passed, I had to go back to the school for an interview. It was quite an awe inspiring experience for a young boy of ten having to go on his own into this new imposing building (it opened in 1931) with its large portico, long corridors and shining parquet floors. A great deal different from Two Waters School, which was old and always smelt musty and damp. I was taken from the secretary's office to meet two serious looking

gentlemen in black gowns and dark suits who asked me to spell words and to talk about myself. I had to go on my own for the interview. Why my parents weren't with me I don't know. I must have impressed the two gentlemen, Mr Screeton and Mr Harrison, who I subsequently found out to be the Headmaster and his deputy.

Sometime in June my parents were informed that I had been awarded a County Scholarship to attend Hemel Hempstead Grammar School. I was told that I was very privileged. The school was under the control of the Hertfordshire County Council and the majority of the pupils were fee paying. All my parents had to pay was 7/6d every term. We had to go to the Westminster Bank in the High street to pay the fee and to obtain a stamped receipt, which I had to present to my form teacher on the first day of each term. I was required to have a school uniform, something new to me. To begin with this was a grey suit with short trousers white shirt and school tie, long socks with a gold and blue band at the top, black shoes, a school cap with the school badge of a gold hart in a shield, a blue gabardine Mac and of course a leather satchel. As well I needed gym shorts, vest and plimsolls as well as sports clothes including football boots and a football shirt. This was quite an outlay for my father who at that time probably earned less than £5 a week. In the later years at school I was obliged to wear either a blue or grey suit with long trousers. Mrs Mileham, a bee keeping acquaintance of my father, had sons at Berkhamsted School, a minor Public School. I was given the suits they had grown out of. Sports at the Grammar School were compulsory. How I hated football, standing around on a windswept muddy pitch on a cold wet winter's afternoon. I never have been able to kick a ball with any sense of direction. Cricket in the summer was just as boring. I was hopeless at batting and couldn't bowl a ball however hard I tried. How much better I thought to have been inside reading a good book. For some reason or other I did enjoy cross-country running and being out in the countryside with the feel of the air on my face as I ran through fields and through the wilds of Shrub hill Common. Then back to school and the luxury of a hot shower before going home. A far cry from the tin bath back home on a Friday night. I was not much good at gym either as I was hopeless at climbing ropes or using the apparatus for vaulting. I was scared stiff of hurting myself. In today's language I was what you might call a bit of a wimp.

I progressed through the Grammar School, always in the lower half of the class, or form as it was called. At the end of each term I dreaded the

day when the school report would come with the morning post. I used to stay in bed as long as I could on those mornings fearful of what my father would say. I knew more or less when the report would arrive. No remarks were ever passed as to what I had achieved in the way of marks or position in class or to the remarks made by staff about my work. I was allowed to read the reports which were then folded up and put away. A lot was expected of me after attaining a scholarship but my performance was just average. The comments were always "could do better" or "must try harder "and "careless work". Exam time was a great deal better though as I always did fairly well. Neither of my parents discussed things with me or asked me about how I was progressing. The school reports would be the only contact my parents had with the school. I can never remember them visiting the school at all; probably they would have felt uncomfortable in the presence of the teachers all of whom had been to university. I had no difficulty in being with the predominantly middle class children, we being working class. Many of my friends lived in the new houses then being built in Bargrove Avenue Boxmoor, all with the modern conveniences of the time. Their fathers mostly worked in London with good jobs, whilst their mothers stayed at home and had help in the house. My father was a motor mechanic in one of town's larger garages and the only help my mother had was if my father helped with the washing up after dinner on Sundays. My two best friends were Bill Thomas and a Scots boy called Willie Ewing. Their fathers worked at the railway headquarters at Euston Station and wore suits and bowler hats to work. My dad wore a pair of oily overalls. The boys often came home with me after school and stayed for tea. I can never ever remember there being any snobbery between us or anyone else in my class just because I was a Scholarship boy and they were fee paying. That didn't seem to matter to us. I had girl friends as well; one I remember was the daughter of the manager of Lloyds Bank.

I did miss my parents on sports days when most of my classmates' mothers and fathers came along. One of the events of the day was afternoon tea in the quadrangles with scones and sandwiches. Tickets had to be bought in advance and were 2/6 each. I knew we couldn't afford it. The staff always made a big thing about making sure we all had tickets. I used to feel a bit guilty because I was the only one in the class who didn't buy any. Dad often worked on a Saturday afternoon and mother wouldn't have wanted to come on her own as John my brother was always a bit of a handful. Anyhow there would have been little interest for them as rarely did I get to take part other than in the heats.

One thing that I always enjoyed doing was reading the newspaper each day. We had the Daily Mail and I loved to read the comic strip Teddy Tail all about the adventures of a mouse and his family as well as the news of course. I followed the situation in Europe as it developed from 1937 onwards. I was always allowed to read what I wanted. When the weekly Picture Post was published I bought it every week. I think it took the whole of my pocket money. Newspapers still continue to be an essential part of my daily reading. I have digressed a little so back to school days!

When I think what school was like for my own children and for my grandchildren there is one striking difference between the relationship my parents had with the school and my teachers and the relationships that have existed in the schools that my children and their children have attended. Whether it was from choice or because the opportunities did not arise my parents had no face to face contact with my teachers at all. There were no parents' evenings, no consultations with staff as to how I was performing. I just went to school each day, despite the weather, walking both ways twice a day, regardless of how I felt. I came home at half past four each day, had my tea and went upstairs, most evenings to my unheated bedroom to do my homework or any studying that was required. In the winter the only light I had was from a single candle. I wore an old overcoat to keep me warm. I can never ever remember either my Mother or Father wanting to see what I had done or asking how I got on or looking through my books, or even offering me any help.

My favourite subjects at Grammar School were History and French. How I loathed art as I was hopeless at it but even so it was a compulsory subject. Why we weren't allowed to do something else I don't know. Handwriting was my one downfall and plagued my relationship with many of the teachers. Mr Evans the French master even refused to mark my work on several occasions. Mr Harrison the English teacher was always scathing about the rubbish I wrote (not the content but the way I presented it).

It was obvious towards the end of 1938 that the country was heading for war and of course we at school were aware of what was going on. Two years ahead, 1940, was for most of us our last year at school and the taking in June of that year of our final exam the School Certificate. This would give us entry into the adult world of the workplace. The final year at school 1939/1940 was the most enjoyable year of my time at the Grammar School. For some reason unbeknown to me I was transferred from 5A to 5B at the beginning of that year away from all my friends although I did know all

of the people in the class. Classes were small just 24 or even down as low as 22. Most of the time during this year was spent in preparing ourselves for our final exams, with the emphasis on mock exams. For most of the time our teachers took a relaxed approach to everything we did. The year of course started with the outbreak of war, not that at first it made any difference to our day to day activities. The only thing that I recollect was the nuisance of carting your gas mask around with you all the time. There was of course extra fire drills and air raid practice when we all filed into the girls bicycle sheds, which had been converted with the aid of a few sand bags, into the most basic of air raid shelters. We never had cause to use them for the real thing. I remember in June and July the weather being sunny and warm. Despite the evacuation from Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain taking place our thoughts were on sitting our School Certificate exams rather than on the war. Out of all the exams I took the only one that I recall was my French Oral. This took place in the school library. I had really enjoyed the set book that we had studied "Voyage au Centre de la Terre "by Jules Verne, a sci-fi novel. The lady who took the exam was a jolly person and I joked and laughed with her and discussed the book. Much to my amazement I was awarded a Credit. I had always thought of French as being among my worst subjects.

School days were over and the next task was to look for a job. I had a girl friend Gladys, who was in my class and after the exams were over we spent much of our spare time together. There were some lovely walks around Hemel and with the good weather we played tennis most mornings. Gladys lived just opposite the school in Heath Lane in a lovely new detached house. I was an almost permanent guest at supper. Gladys and I and our friends used to lie on the grass at Shrub hill Common and watch the German bombers as they flew through the clouds overhead on their way to bomb the car plants at Dunstable. The seriousness of what was taking place meant nothing to us. And so my school days came to an end in July 1940.

MEMORIES OF HEMEL HEMPSTEAD GRAMMAR SCHOOL
1935 - 1940

I was one of the Scholarship boys of the 1930's who life was transformed by my experiences during those five years 1935 to 1940. On reflection I know that being able to go HHGS enabled me to go beyond the confines of Hemel Hempstead. I have realised too what a privilege this was to have received the education that was offered to me.

My memories of the school start before I became a pupil at that grand building in Heath Lane. I had passed the written part of the scholarship examination and was told to go to the school for an interview. I went with a friend who had also passed the written test; neither of my parents came with me. I remember arriving and going in through the front door. Miss Carpenter, the school secretary greeted me – she was a relative of my mother – and we were told to wait. Eventually I was shown into this impressive room containing a very big desk and several armchairs. Two very serious looking gentlemen in suits with black gowns greeted me and started to ask me questions. One of them asked me to spell "biscuit" which I got wrong. I really did not know what was expected of me, after all I was just a scruffy ten and a half year old from Two Waters elementary school, and this was a very posh place. I must have done something to impress the two gentlemen, who I found out later to be Mr Screeton and Mr Harrison, as I was accepted and started at the beginning of term, September 1935.

I was a happy boy for most of my time at school. Boring would be the term used to describe me today. Nothing much bothered me except sport which I hated, after all what was the point of standing in the middle of a muddy field on a cold winter's afternoon trying to kick a ball about. I preferred to stay indoors with a good book. I could never understand why my class mates got so excited about it! There was one aspect that I did however enjoy, Cross Country Running, even in the winter months. I was an average scholar, described in my reports as "could do better if he tried harder" My one failing though was my handwriting. "Atrocious" said Mr Harrison who sometimes refused to mark my homework. "Taffy" Evans my French teacher went even further and resorted to putting a red line through most things that I wrote. I am afraid that the passage of time has done nothing to improve its legibility - as my family will tell you!

In June of 1940, despite the war, the time came to sit our School Certificate examinations. I can't remember being particularly bothered and I just got on with it. I do know that I really enjoyed my French Oral exam which was held in the library and French wasn't my best subject by far and I passed with a Credit!

HOLIDAYS IN THE 1930s

It is difficult to remember all the holidays that we had during these years but as a general rule we had one holiday every year in the summer, always during the long school holidays. Most of the holidays were camping holidays mainly because they didn't cost a lot. They were what we today call "self-catering holidays". Because my father worked in the motor trade we always had the use of some form of motor transport, a car of some description.

Ted and Pat at Jaywick Sands 1933

There was an early holiday that I have very fond memories of. I must have been about eight at the time. I can only suppose that money must have been short as Mother and John and I went down to Aldermaston in Berkshire, Granddad Johnson's home village, to stay with Mother's Aunt Jenny for two weeks. We went by car, one that Dad had borrowed from a friend of his. Aunt Jenny stayed a mile or so from what was then a very small village, several miles outside Reading. It really was in the deepest countryside, miles from anywhere. The house stood by itself on the edge of a pine forest. There were no near neighbours, no telephone, no wireless and no electricity. The lighting was oil lamps and candles, the water came from a well in the garden and the lavatory was outside in a small shed. It had two seats one for the grownups and another for children. There was a large drop underneath and we were told that there was no messing about in there or the consequences would be dire. Behind the door hung illustrated biblical texts printed on linen. I was fascinated. Coloured religious pictures decorated the house in every room. We boys had great adventures as we were allowed to wander at will and spent most of our time playing on the edge of the forest and in the surrounding fields. We saw snakes, lizards and squirrels and sometimes deer. If we needed to go into Aldermaston we had to walk, as there was no transport of any kind. Aunt Jenny did have a bicycle I believe. The house,

I have learned since, belonged to a large estate where Aunt's husband worked. Those were two wonderful weeks.

Another holiday that I can recollect was one spent at Mundsley on the Norfolk coast. I traveled from Hemel Hempstead by motor cycle and sidecar. I sat behind Dad on the pillion seat and Mother and my brother John were in the sidecar. It was quite a distance from home to Norfolk and it wasn't very comfortable all that way on the back of the motor cycle. We had a tent on the cliffs just outside the village. A friend of Dad's had left a tent there for us. I think we were there for a week. The cliffs were not all that steep and were of sand. John and I had great fun sliding down them from the campsite onto the beach below. The site must have been on some farmland as there were some pigs not far away who ate all our rubbish. How we took all the camping equipment I have no idea. One day when we were all ready to go out, I believe it was to Cromer. John and I were playing around and he fell into a muddy pond not far from the pigsty. We all had to wait whilst clean clothes were found. Mother was not very happy having to sleep on the ground every night without a mattress and the tent leaked when it rained. Father did all the cooking on a small Primus stove. I don't think we ever went out to eat anywhere. There probably wasn't any money to spare for things like that.

I remember going down to Woolacombe in Devonshire. Dad had the use of a very small Austin Seven that seated just four of us. We two boys sat in the bank on a very hard seat. Mother must have made it clear that if we were to continue to go camping it was for her to be a little more comfortable. To this end a double mattress was strung alongside one side of the car. On the other side hung camping equipment. One small case and a cardboard box were strapped on a carrier at the rear of the car along with the spare wheel. How long it took to get there I have no idea. I do remember going past Stonehenge and wondering what it was. We were not far from the beach at Woolacombe and the beach was wonderful. As usual Dad did all the cooking. One day we went out, as we did most days, and Dad bought some crabs from a fisherman. They were alive and needed to be cooked. He tucked them under the front seat. On the journey home the crabs decided to venture out from their hiding place. There were screams from Mother as they began to crawl around her feet. She spent the rest of the way back to the campsite with her feet up on the seat. The crabs were eventually boiled, still alive, in a bucket. I had my first visit to the theatre on that holiday. Dad must have had a little bit of money to spare

because we were taken one evening to a theatre in Ilfracombe to see the play "Night Must Fall" by Emlyn Williams. It was a thriller and possibly a little bit scary for children of our age. I must have been about ten then and John three years younger. On the way home we two started to quarrel in the back of the car and would not keep quite. There was a bit of a mist as we went along the coast road and Mother was getting agitated. We didn't help. As we were going down a very steep hill she said "stop the car I am going to get out I have had enough". She didn't of course and it had the desired effect of shutting us boys up.

Another holiday that I remember well was also a camping one. We went down to Lullworth Cove in Dorset and camped on top of the cliffs overlooking Durdle Door a rock formation jutting out from the cliffs. The weather wasn't particularly good and it rained quite a bit. On one evening just after we had eaten a storm came up from over the sea with an almost gale force wind. I think it was in 1938 and I was almost fourteen. The wind became so strong that Dad was worried that the tent might blow away. He and I hung on to the guy ropes whilst Mother and John stayed inside. For a while it was touch and go. The wind at last subsided but rain had seeped into the tent. For Mother it was not a very happy night. I think that was the last time that we went camping.

MEMORIES OF CHRISTMAS 1934

Christmas was-:

An evening with Grandma writing lists of presents
Mysterious parcels wrapped in brown paper on top of Mum's wardrobe.
Flour and water mixed in a saucer for making paper chains
A big wooden spoon for stirring the Christmas pudding in
The bowl from the washstand
Silver threepenny bits, almonds and candied peel,
The smell of brandy.
Plucking the chicken, feathers on the kitchen floor.
Watching secretly from behind the door as the bird is drawn.
Feeling sick.

Christmas was: -

Undressing in front of the fire
Pyjamas warming on the fire guard.
Stone hot water bottles in old knitted socks.
Pillow cases at the foot of the bed.
PRAYERS
Excited chatter after the candle is blown out.

Christmas was: -

Waking early in the dark morning
Cold feet on cold lino
Frost on the windowpane
Looking in John's pillowcase before my own.
A Hornby train set with an extra truck,

Chocolate coins, humbugs and tangerines in silver paper.

A fire in the front room

Holly behind the picture frames,

Mistletoe in the hall

Candles alight on the Christmas tree.

The smell of roast dinner, brussel sprouts and gravy.

Crackers and Dad looking silly in a paper hat

Listening to the King on the wireless set.

Being told to keep quiet.

Mum washing up

Dad asleep in the armchair.

Christmas was: -

LATE TEA AT GRANDMA'S HOUSE

Uncles and Aunts with red faces

Everyone is there - Auntie Con, Auntie Doris and Walter

Uncle Charlie and Flossie, Uncle Alec and Peg, Uncle Son and Aunt Ethel

John and Mona and Albert.

The kitchen table with no room for the plates

Ham sandwiches, tinned salmon in a glass bowl,

Cheese and pickled onions, bread and butter and sausage rolls.

A special walnut cake from Weston's

Marzipan left on the side of my plate,

A big brown teapot.

In the corner of the sitting room Uncle Arthur jealously guards the bran tub.

Fingers digging deep searching for presents,

Pencil, rubbers and toffees wrapped in crepe paper

The gaslight turned down low
Gasps of delight as a tray of raisins is carried in, flaming in the dark
Laughter and singing round the piano.
Jokes I couldn't understand
The heat from the fire
Sitting on Dad's lap half asleep.

Christmas was: -

Holding Mum's hand and walking Home in the dark with eyes half shut
Home at last, the ashes still glowing in the fireplace.
A cold house, cold pyjamas, a cold bed.
The eiderdown pulled up around my ears
No prayers tonight - I'm too tired
That was Christmas 1934
Next year I'm going to be eleven

THE CHURCH CHOIR

I must have been about nine or ten when it was suggested to me that I might like to join the Church choir at our parish church of St John's in Boxmoor. I had attended Sunday school for a few years and had been introduced to basic Christianity and knew most of the Gospel stories. As of the Church itself I knew very little about it and had not been to any church services. Mum and Dad used to go to early communion occasionally.

I remember going to a kind of audition and being accepted. I think the first service I attended was Evensong. Mother and Aunt Con came along there were two other boys beside myself and we were fitted with our first cassocks and seated in the choir stalls at the far end away from the congregation and told to keep quiet. Choir practice, which we had to attend, was held on Fridays in the early evening after tea. I enjoyed being taught how to sing and soon after this I became a member of the choir itself. The boy's choir consisted of sixteen of us. There were also ten or so men as well. We boys were paid 6d a week given to us once a month. I was allowed to keep my earnings and to spend it on what I liked. Most of it went on adding to my stamp collection. Each Sunday at 11. 00am we attended Matins and at 6. 30pm Evensong. The organist was Mr. George Cheshire who though strict with us really taught us how to sing. When I look back I am surprised that we were only taught how to follow the notes and not to read music.

Most Sundays, during morning worship as well as the usual hymns and psalms we also sang an anthem. These required a great deal of practice and rehearsal. At Christmas and Easter there was always special music. I came to love Handel's Messiah, which we performed several times; I came to have a great affection for all types of church music. This led, in later years to me taking a much greater part in Church life.

It was through the choir that I met Cyril Connew. We remained firm friends for many years. He was a year or so younger than me and was the youngest of a large family. Most of his brothers and his only sister were married and living away from home. His Father who worked on the railways died soon after we became friends, but I cannot remember him being upset about it. His mother was a very lovely person much older than my mother was and for long after his father's death wore black most of the time. Looking back over those years Cyril must have taken the place of John, my young brother, with whom I found it difficult to have any kind of relationship

OUR NEIGHBOURS AT 64 LAWN LANE

THE WINDEBANKS

64 Lawn lane, or as it used to be called 15 Corner Hall until the mid thirties, was at one end of a terrace of three houses, which at a guess were built at the beginning of the 19th century. The family who occupied the middle house had the unusual surname of Windebank. They were a rough crowd. Father, Mother and four children. The eldest was Fred then Hilda followed by Eric and Percy. Percy was a little older that me and we used to play together in the yard at the rear of the house at the other end of the terrace The Windebank's house was a mystery to me. The only part I ever saw was the living room or kitchen as we called it: I never went inside at all. The back door was always open except when the weather was bad. There was no covering of any kind to the floor. The bare boards looked as if they had rarely ever seen a broom or a scrubbing brush. A large wooden table and several old chairs were the only furniture in the room. The table was covered by a piece of well worn oilcloth and in the middle always stood a bottle of brown sauce and what appeared to be pepper and salt pots which, from the look of them, had never been washed up. The only means of cooking that I could see were a small black rusty coal range and a gas ring. Beside the range was an old dented bucket with coal in it. There was an ever-pervading smell of onions. Mrs Windebank was invariably sitting by the fire. She was a very large lady and I can only remember seeing her in her wrap around pinafore and slippers. She wore her hair in a wispy knot on top of her head. I often wondered if she ever washed. A solitary gaslight without a shade hung from the centre of the ceiling. Dangling from it in the summer there was often flypaper covered with dead flies. A grey piece of lace curtain at the window completed the scene. Our house compared to the Windebank's was impeccable.

Percy and I being of a similar age used to play together in the summer. Quite often John my brother joined in as well. One game that we played regularly was called "catty". The person who was 'in' had a large stick usually the copper stick, which was used to get the washing from the copper on a Monday morning. The thrower threw a small piece of wood called a cat and the idea was to hit it as far as possible. The lengths of the copper stick were measured from where the cat landed to the wicket which was the clothesline prop. The one who had the most lengths was the winner. In the summer, using the clothesline prop as a wicket, we played cricket. One evening just after teatime when we were playing I hit

the ball hard and smashing a windowpane it landed on the tea table of the end house among their plates and teacups. There was uproar, Percy disappeared quickly and I was left to face Mrs. Mead the lady who lived there. I wasn't punished and Dad mended the window.

Percy or "Our Perce "as he was known by his family was a bit of a bully, he was a lot bigger then I was. One day we fell out over some game or other and he started to hit me. I lost my temper and hit him smartly over the head with something or other giving him a nasty cut. Mrs. Windebank was furious and rightly so. It was the only time I can remember seeing her cross and having words with my Mother. After I went to the Grammar School I saw very little of him.

Fred Windebank, the father, was a tall thin man who always wore a cloth cap and a cloth scarf worn around the neck called a muffler. He very rarely spoke though we did occasionally hear him swear. He used to frequent the Queens Head pub which was just down the road from us and he spent a great deal of his time there especially at weekends. On Saturday nights he would invariably arrive home worse for wear just after half past ten soon after the pub had closed. If I was sleeping in the back bedroom nearest to their house you would hear the backdoor being flung open followed by a violent breaking of wind and the sound of Fred heartily relieving himself of the pints of ale that he had consumed during the evening. Going down some steep steps in the dark to use the outside lavatory would, in his drunken state, have been perilous. And if it was raining there was no need for him to get wet. By today's hygiene standards this would be completely unacceptable and would warrant complaints from the neighbours. Mum and Dad said that it was "Just Fred". He had done this ever since they had lived at number 64 and he wasn't going to change now.

Mrs W also had some rather unsanitary habits. The family was extremely fond of winkles and the empty shells were disposed of by chucking them out of the back door to be crunched under foot on the concrete yard. The sweepings from the kitchen floor were also just pushed over the doorstep onto the yard. All the rubbish was eventually washed away by the rain, down the steps to join all the other detritus from past years. It didn't seem to hurt anyone; the Windebanks never seemed to get ill or have much wrong with them.

The daughter Hilda got married and went to live in St Albans and came back to see the family quite often. Despite the way in which she had lived

she was the opposite of her mother and was always beautifully turned out. The elder son Fred was called up at the beginning of the War and was killed at El-Alemein. What happened to Eric and Percy I don't know. Mrs Windebank was found drowned in the Grand Union Canal sometime during the 1950's; life had become too much for her.

MRS MEAD. HAROLD AND DORIS AND MRS MEAD'S SISTERS HETTY AND CISSIE

Mrs Mead the head of the household at No. 68 Lawn Lane, (19 Corner Hall) on the other side of the Windebank's, was in complete contrast to the Windebanks. As a small boy I didn't have a great deal to do with them, as they didn't seem to like little boys. All I knew about them was from my Mother. Mrs Mead was a widow who had lost her husband in the First World War and was left on her own to bring up her two children, Harold and Doris. Also living at No 68 were Mrs Mead's two spinster sisters Hetty and Cissie. They kept themselves very much to themselves and just nodded in recognition if you met them in the street. They were strict Methodists and were according to Mother very straight laced.

What they must have thought of the Widebanks' lack of hygiene is anyone's guess. As I grew older and at the Grammar School they must have thought I was fairly civilized as I was asked in on the odd occasion. The house was spotless (not like ours!). I don't think that they had a wireless as I didn't see or hear one on my visits. They never said very much to me just generally inquired about school and how I was getting on. Dad used to pass ribald remarks about them and speculated on how poor Harold fared among all those women. Harold was very tall and thin with huge flat feet, a small head and a very receding chin. For some reason he was not called up during the war, possibly because of his feet. His sister Doris was very plain and very much under her Mother's thumb. I could never imagine any of them having a good laugh or telling a risqué joke. They were, to the outside world, very proper.

When I was in the army Mrs. Mead always wanted to see me when I was home on leave. It was then that I got to know her and her sisters Hetty and Cissie. They were lonely ladies who had been denied male company for one reason or another. Mrs. Mead's husband was killed in the First World War. I said goodbye to them when I left go to Rhodesia in 1949. What happened to them after that I have no idea? Looking back over the years they must have lead a very lonely life. The Methodist Church would have

provided their only diversion outside of the home. All this result of the First World War and the loss of their loved ones.

AUNT PHYLL, JOYCE AND UNCLE CLIFFORD

Aunt Phyll was born on the 1st of October 1898 and was my mother's only sister.

She had a significant influence on my early life which has in someway continued into the present time. I think that she always thought of me as the son that she didn't have. The first clear memories of her are when she lived along with her husband, Uncle Clifford and my cousin Joyce in a large Georgian house not far from where we lived in Lawn Lane, or Corner Hall as it was then called. The house had the imposing name of "Moor End House" It stood in its own grounds, about half an acre or more, with high walls surrounding it. You entered the gardens through a large gate on the corner of Wood Lane and Marlowes opposite the Plough public house. Just inside the gate was a large yew tree which stood for many years after the house was demolished. The garden consisted of lawns at the front and one side of the house with herbaceous borders framed by several large imposing beech trees. It was a great place to have tea outside on a summer afternoon. At the rear of the house was a kitchen garden with fruit trees, gooseberry and current bushes. To the side were several outbuildings including a garage all facing onto a paved yard. There were double gates opening out into Wood Lane. It was always quiet there despite the adjacent houses and the fact that Marlowes was the main road leading to the High Street in what is now know as The Old Town.

A path from the front gate led up to an imposing front door which opened into a large hallway, almost as big as our living room, in fact it was like a small sitting room. There was always a fire burning during the winter and into the spring. o the right up some steps was a door which led into a comfortable room which was the housekeeper's sitting room and where she spent her time off. This led through to the kitchen and scullery. From the housekeeper's room a small staircase went up to her bedroom on the floor above. I remember two rather colourful housekeepers that Aunty employed. The first was the formidable Mrs King, always dressed in black and an ardent spiritualist whose guide was an American Indian. She was followed by a Mrs O'Flarotghy (sic) an Irish lady who was very difficult to understand. The last one that I can recollect was Marjorie, a country girl from Piccotts End.

Now back to the house! Leading off from the hallway to the left was the dining room. It was a large room with French doors opening out onto

the garden. There was an imposing antique sideboard laden with silver candelabra, silver jugs, two of which now grace my own sideboard, and various other items which caught your eye as you walked in. From the rear of the hallway a staircase led up to the bedrooms. To the left of the staircase a wide passage took you to a rather grand drawing room, also with French doors leading onto lawns. The room was furnished with two settees and various armchairs all upholstered in blue damask with a gold pattern. There was also a large electric gramophone and a baby grand piano. Although the whole place was much more lavish than our end of the terrace house I never felt overwhelmed by everything after all why should I be. It was where Aunt Phyll, Uncle Clifford and my cousin Joyce lived. The one thing that did fascinate me stood on a small table in the hallway - a telephone. One of the old candlestick types. If ever Mother or Father needed to use the telephone, which was seldom, they used to go down to Moor End House.

Uncle Clifford worked in the City (London). I have never found out just what he did. He travelled to town each morning, sometimes by car but mostly by train driven to the station at Boxmoor by his part time chauffeur. My cousin Joyce went to a small private school at the top end of Marlowes run by a Miss Brocklehurst and then in 1931 started as a fee paying pupil at the then new Hemel Hempstead Grammar School. Aunt Phyll, despite having this large house and a housekeeper to run it, had no illusions of grandeur and was often found in the garden with the gardener or in the kitchen with the housekeeper helping with the cooking.

I think it must have been in 1933 that Aunt Phyll had to go into hospital for what was, I was told, a very serious operation. Details of her condition were not discussed in front of children so I never really understood what was happening. All I knew was that she was very ill and was required to go into Guy's Hospital in London. After the operation she returned home and was very ill, for what seemed to me to be a very long time and during this was confined to bed. By then I was a member of the boys' choir at St John's Church Boxmoor. Several times when she was very ill indeed I was taken up to her bedroom to sing her favourite hymn "Immortal Invisible God only wise". Often on these occasions a redoubtable presence in the bedroom was Aunt's Phyll's mother-in-law Mrs Jordan. She was a very large lady always dressed in black. She frightened the life out of me and looking back it is a wonder that I could sing at all. I remember one time after singing I was dismissed to the garden so that Aunty could

rest. It must have been toward the end of summer because the gooseberry bushes were "loaded" with fruit. As I was eating my fill of juicy golden gooseberries an upstairs window opened and Mrs Jordan appeared shouting "That wicked boy was stealing the fruit". The booming voice of the formidable Mrs Jordan stayed with me for a long time. I don't think I was ever punished. In time Aunt Phyll recovered. I believe that she had had a hysterectomy! Life at Moor End House then continued as before. Fluffy a black and white cat ruled the roost and was allowed to do just as he pleased he even had his special cushion.

My cousin Joyce always had, what I recall as up-market parties, at Christmas for all her friends. I usually got invited, more out of family loyalty than anything else. With boys and girls at least five years older than me all at the Grammar School I did feel rather out of it. They played all sorts of party games that were a bit beyond me. Most of them couldn't be bothered with a small boy. Sometimes too, in the early autumn there would be parties in the evenings to go and see the illuminations at Southend-on-Sea. Robin and Don Ward Aunt Phyll's cousins from Reading often came for them. I was never invited probably because I was too young. There was one gathering I have fond memories of that took place to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of King George V in 1935. The garden wall facing Marlowes was gaily decorated with flags and bunting and pictures of the King and Queen. We all stood on chairs and watched a procession go past and then stayed on to tea.

November the Fifth was another time I enjoyed. John, my brother, and me went down to Aunt Phylls' for high tea and afterwards we went with Joyce and her friends into the garden to light fireworks. I must admit I didn't care much for the loud bangers. I still don't like them. There was usually a large box of many different kinds of fireworks, many more than father used to buy. I had started at the Grammar School in the September of 1935 so I must have been 11years old at the time. On this particular bonfire night Joyce and her friend Rosalind Pearman thought that I was now old enough to help light the fireworks. I must have been excited about being allowed to do this and in my haste dropped a lighted match into the box. The whole lot exploded as we ran for cover. Mother, Aunt Phyll and the housekeeper Marjorie were watching us from an upstairs window. I was never allowed to forget this little episode. I loved that house. It always seemed such a happy place to me.

Unbeknown to me this "happy place" was all an illusion which was soon to be shattered in the early summer of 1936. I am unable to remember just what took place but we no longer went to Moor End House and I cannot recollect asking about why this sudden change or being told of what had happened. Nothing was ever talked about in my presence. I have since found out that Uncle Clifford was having an affair with a divorced neighbour but all I knew was that Aunt Phyll and Joyce were now going to live in a place called Earley, near Reading. I wasn't familiar with the town. My Grandfather came from Aldermaston a few miles away. His sister Aunt Ginny lived there still and his younger sister Aunt Nell lived on a council estate at the other end of Reading from Earley. I had been taken to visit them (my Mother's Aunts) several times.

After a short while Mother and Father went down to visit Aunt Phyll and Joyce. I can call to mind them returning and telling John and me about the beautiful new house they had. The huge lounge, the large hallway and staircase with a fitted pink carpet and the bathroom (we hadn't one at all) with its pink bathroom suite; yes even the lavatory was pink. As far as I knew those items only came in white. None of my friends from school had anything like that. After a while, Father having borrowed a car from the garage where he worked, drove us down to 6 Betchworth Avenue, Earley on a Sunday morning for the day. This became a regular "event". Every other Sunday morning we would set out for Aunt Phyll's whatever the weather. The journey usually took us just over an hour, going from Hemel Hempsted through Bovingdon, Chesham, Amersham, and High Wycombe and over the Thames at Marlow and on to Earley which was this side of Reading. Depending on the time of the year there was invariably a roaring fire in the lounge and the smell of roast dinner pervading the house. After sherry there was lunch in the dining room. " 'There was never any sign" of Uncle Clifford and he was not mentioned. Lunch was always an "occasion" with starched serviettes in silver rings, a large silver cruet in the middle of the table. Most times there was a big leg of lamb. There always seemed to be loads of food. After Father had had an afternoon nap and Joyce and I had been for a walk we had tea and, always as far as I was concerned, reluctantly set out for the return journey back home.

There is one memorable journey back home to Hemel I shall never forget. It was sometime in January 1937, I was 13. As usual we had come down for the day which had started off bright and sunny though very cold. The sort

of winter's day when a brisk walk in the countryside could be enjoyed. After lunch Joyce and I went for walk in the lanes that ran at the back of 6 Betchworth Avenue. The house marked the end of the development of that part of Earley and adjoined a large private estate. We weren't gone for long as Father wanted to leave before it got too dark. John, my brother, and I took our places in the back of the car after moaning about how cold it was. The car was an old Bull nosed Morris circa 1923. It was an open tourer with a fabric roof and had what was known as mica screens which slotted into the tops of the doors in place of windows. There was no heating of any type in the car and draughts where everywhere. We wore gloves, hats and scarves and because we moaned so much we were both wrapped in travelling rugs borrowed from Aunt Phyll and as an extra luxury had a hot water bottle each. We set off home. It seemed to get colder and colder the further we came from Earley. As we crossed bridge over the Thames at Marlow it began to snow heavily and the one windscreen wiper laboured as it tried to clear the snow away. Father lent forward to try and see the way ahead. On the approach to the steep hill that leads down into the centre of High Wycombe we came to a halt. Heavy snow was now falling and the visibility was almost down to zero. Despite all the blankets and hot water bottles we two boys in the back were cold and very miserable and not far from tears. All we wanted was to be at home in the warm. The journey home was abandoned and the car was turned round with great difficulty. We proceeded slowly back to Earley where we soon thawed out in front of the lounge fire. Plied with hot milk we were soon tucked up in a warm feather bed. John and I didn't normally sleep together, but for once our enmities were put aside. On Monday we were up early, we had to go to school and father had to be at work. He decided to take another route home via Maidenhead and Slough and then on through Rickmansworth and Watford. This was a longer way. The roads were treacherous being covered in ice. I don't know if they had such things as gritters in those days? Twice on braking the car turned full circle and there were screams from John and I. We were told in no uncertain terms to shut up and be quiet and on no account to be sick in the back of the car. I remember that we arrived home cold and very miserable. The house was freezing and the fire had to be lit. There was no school that Monday for either John or I. Father had to go to work, he couldn't afford to take time off and of course Mother had the washing to do.

From then onwards I used to spend several weeks in the summer holidays with Aunt Phyll. I used to look forward to going, not that I was unhappy

at home, far from it. It was the more comfortable way of living that I enjoyed with all the conveniences of what was then a modern house. The bathroom with hot and cold water, the spacious kitchen, silver cutlery and always a serviette at mealtimes. Visits to town and also to the local village of Earley and of course to St Peter's Church on Sunday mornings. It was so different from St John's Boxmoor, more colourful and more musical.

In the hall was a bookcase full of books. More modern ones than the ones in our bookcase at home. I remember reading the collected works of Conan Doyle. I couldn't get enough of Sherlock Holmes. There were lots of other novels too which I enjoyed. I suppose I liked it so much at 6 Betchworth Avenue because I was spoiled and if I am to be completely honest the way of life was a bit more upper class. After all I was a Grammar School boy. I was developing into a bit of snob, abetted by Aunt Phyll, though I did not think so at the time. Most of it would be knocked out of me in a few years time, but deep down there would still be a little bit of it left.

It was during the summer of 1938 that I had my first and only taste of eating in a posh London restaurant. During my annual stays Uncle Clifford was never mentioned in my presence and he never put in an appearance when I was there. I can't ever remember being puzzled as to why he wasn't around. This particular day, however, I was told to put on my best clothes as we were going up to London to meet Uncle for lunch. I did as I was told and off we went. I believe the name of the restaurant was Frascati's where it was I have no idea. The ceiling was draped like the inside of an eastern tent with large chandeliers. It was most impressive. I had only ever seen anything likes this on the films. There I had my first taste of brandy. I had just water with my meal whilst the others had wine. After we had finished and Uncle Clifford was smoking his cigar the waiter arrived with brandies in large balloon glasses. Uncle ordered another one and when it came told me it was for me. At almost 14 I had never tasted anything alcoholic before. Here I was faced with a glass of brandy. With Uncle Clifford you did as you were told, he was a very bombastic character. I duly sipped my drink, the first of many to follow over the next few years.

1939 was to see the end of my summer trips to Reading. I was there for two weeks, maybe three in late August and the first part of September. I think that it was three weeks because I was at 6 Betchworth Avenue when Anne, my sister, was born on the 3rd September of that year on the day that war was declared. The day after I arrived I was introduced to my girl friend, arranged by Auntie, who was to keep me company during

my stay. Her name was Cynthia Roper who lived in a beautiful house just down the Avenue. We got on well together, as far as I can recollect. I believe that she probably went to a private school. Anyhow it was all great fun and I was made welcome by her parents. I wonder if their reaction would have been the same had they known my background. Still they were very nice to me. In the week leading up to the 3rd of September, in anticipation of what was to happen, evacuees started to arrive. Aunt Phyll was involved in the organisation that welcomed them and found places for them to stay. Cynthia and I became helpers down at the village hall in Earley. What we did I have no idea but it kept us from sneaking off to the woods and taking long walks in the countryside. Not that there was anything romantic about it, at 14 we both had little idea about the "Facts of Life" as they were referred to. No one mentioned the word sex to us although we had a fair idea of what happened. The thought of it and the consequences frightened us to death and the path leading there was to be avoided at all costs.

Aunt Phyll, like everyone else, especially as she had four bedrooms was required to take in an evacuee. Along came a charming lady know as an expectant mother to stay with us. Even though my mother was expecting a child at time I had no idea what an expectant mother was. Hard to believe! I was very unhappy at the prospect of having a new addition to the family. I was almost fifteen for goodness sake what on earth would my friends at school say. It was most embarrassing to say the least.

Sunday the 3rd of September 1939. For some reason we didn't go to church at St Peter's Earley. There was an air of anticipation that something momentous was going to happen. My cousin Joyce and I were in the drawing room listening to the wireless and preparing runner beans for Sunday lunch when the Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain made his address to the nation declaring war on Germany. There was no news from Hemel Hempstead that day but on Tuesday morning there was a postcard from my Father to say that Mother had given birth to a little girl at 11am on Sunday morning. I remember little of that week which was to be last time I spent school holidays with Aunt Phyll and Joyce at "Marlowes" 6, Betchworth Avenue, Earley, Reading.

Looking back at those three years, 1936 to 1939 there were other things going on at 6 Betchworth Avenue that I didn't appreciate at the time. They concerned my cousin Joyce.

JOYCE

Soon after their arrival in Earley Joyce, then seventeen, had to get a job. There was I am sure little scope for a young girl of that age and with no qualifications and for one who had up till then led a very sheltered existence. There was a rather nice tea shop in the village that did light lunches and coffee and teas, all homemade. The proprietor was a middle aged lady who lived with her elderly mother. An assistant was required and Joyce fitted the bill and of course she was at home with the good class of customer. It was convenient too as it was just ten minutes walk from where she lived. It was here that she learnt her cooking skills, especially in the art of cake making. Her sponges and fruit cakes became renowned. In order to help with finances as Uncle Clifford didn't seem to contribute much to the running of the house, Aunt Phyll took in a lodger known then as a paying guest. His name was Leslie Smith, a smart "alec" if ever there was one. When I look back he must have been a fast worker because he soon became part of the family at 6 Betchworth Avenue with his feet well under the table and not only that his presence extended to Joyce's bed. She had a double bed in her comfortable room. I only know this as I happened on one visit to be up early one morning and followed Aunty into Joyce's bedroom with the early morning tea tray. It was only later on, years later in fact that I came to realise what was taking place. Leslie's influence extended to the house as well. He was involved in the electrical business and it was there that I watched my first Television programme in I think 1938. Leslie of course had a very smart car and used to bring Aunt Phyll and Joyce over to Hemel Hempstead quite often. No remarks about "Goings On" were ever passed in my presence. I have my suspicions too that Aunty was generous with her affection towards the local butcher as there was never any shortage of meat in the house. Fred Salter and his wife were good friends of Auntie's. They had a very vocal parrot that had some very colourful language. Despite all this Joyce and I were like brother and sister. With the outbreak of War and with my leaving school in 1940 and starting work our paths diverged and we gradually saw less and less of each other until the Autumn of 1946 when on return from service in India I was posted to the Royal Signals Records Office in Reading for just over six months pending my demobilisation. Instead of staying in barracks I was permitted to stay with Aunt Phyll and Joyce. Leslie Smith had by that time left the scene in disgrace having taken up with a local hairdresser. Joyce was now working at the Atomic Research Station at Aldermaston.

I always seemed to be short of money, having to take the trolleybus into the town every day and buy my own lunch. Joyce helped me out sometimes when she guessed I was hard up. I would often walk back to Earley from Caversham, where I worked a walk of several miles, to save a bit of money to take my girl friend out at the weekend. It was mid -winter and the walk was often bitterly cold, but I was young and healthy and it did me no harm. When I arrived at Betchworth Avenue it was always warm and there was a good meal waiting. Rationing was strict, how Auntie managed I have often wondered because I contributed nothing. And I was never asked to and just accepted what I was given. Not a word was said. There was always a tot of whiskey before I went to bed. Looking back I really was spoilt. Aunty had a lodger at the time an old bachelor Mr Cameron who worked in the Civil Service. He was a bit of a dry old stick but made sure that I always had something decent to read. They were a very happy few months, even though I didn't express my thoughts very well I really appreciated what was done for me.

"UNCLE CLIFFORD"

After the move from Hemel Hempstead to Reading in 1936, except for the odd occasion, Uncle Clifford was to my knowledge, not heard about or seen when we went down on our fortnightly visits. I never remember questioning his absence. I heard the odd remark that he kept Aunty short of cash. He did at one time buy her; I think it was really meant for Joyce, a Pekinese dog. It was a most unpleasant animal and sneezed and snuffled all the time and had a peculiar smell. It was treated as a child and was allowed to do just as it wanted to. I detested it. Where Uncle Clifford lived or what he did I had no idea.

What took place, according to conversations with my Mother and father many years later is this. Uncle's business, he was a metal broker in the city, failed somehow. He took off with his secretary to live somewhere in North London and as far as I can gather ran a Sub Post Office. He was great snob and liked to believe that he was a little better than others. Why there was no divorce I have no idea. As far as I know the mistress died and of course he was left on his own. He moved back in with Aunt Phyll and to my parent's amusement resumed once more his place in the marital bed after the best part of 40 years. He died in the same bed several years later. There must have been a great deal more to the devious life of Uncle Clifford than I know. Pity I didn't ask a few more questions all those years ago.

THE EARLY WAR YEARS; 1940 - 1943

July 1940 saw me leave the world of the classroom and enter the workplace. During my last school year I had seen the evacuation from Dunkirk; the German advance through Europe and the Battle of Britain. The world was in turmoil. Not the sort of time to be looking for a job especially with the prospect of being called up into the army in two years time. Besides who would want to employ a young boy just out of school with no experience and no long-term prospects? So for the August and September of that year, despite the threat of invasion and the general uncertainty, I spent the time with my friends playing tennis most days and with glorious weather for the majority of the time, out in the local countryside enjoying ourselves oblivious to the perilous situation which hung over the country. I cannot remember being the least bit worried about the uncertain future. During those months, together with my friend from school Bill Thomas, I did reluctantly go for an interview in London about employment with London Transport. Needless to say they had nothing to offer us.

My father became rather fed up seeing his eldest son, now the possessor of a School Certificate with several credits, swanning around, cadging a few bob here and there, being fed, clothed and housed at his expense. I was having too good a time to be unduly worried. I wasn't alone in this as very few of my compatriots had managed to get any kind of employment. My girl friend Gladys did eventually manage to get work at the L M S Railway Headquarters at the Grove in Watford, possibly because her father also worked there. Bill Thomas ended up in the local branch of the National Westminster Bank. I though wasn't all that bothered.

Dad arrived home from work one evening and informed me that there was a job for me at the main Post Office in town. He knew the Head Postmaster, Mr Houchen. An interview had been arranged for me the following morning. My heart sunk as the only jobs that I knew about at the Post Office were those for Postmen and Telegraph Messenger boys. My time at the Grammar School had been inclined to make me feel a little above my station (we were after all working class) and perhaps a bit of a snob. How was I going to face my friends and explain to them that I was going to be a Telegraph Messenger boy? At that time I couldn't even ride a bike, one of the essentials for the job. My father was to be obeyed, no questions asked. There were no arguments. I meekly went for the interview and was accepted for a job as a temporary Sorting Clerk and Telegraphist. I started the following Monday, the beginning of October

1940. It was classed as a temporary post as during the war years there were no permanent appointments made within the Civil Service. Anyhow I now had a job and would be earning some money, albeit not very much. At least I was now gainfully employed much to my father's relief. I can't remember my mother having anything to say about the matter at all.

The first two weeks at the Post Office were spent alone in a small room with several sets of pigeonholes and several large racks of cards with the names of towns and counties in Great Britain. These I had to sort into the correct boxes. From time to time throughout the day someone would come in to check to see how I was progressing. I was lonely and I was bored. What had I let myself in for? I must have satisfied someone because I was soon let loose in the sorting office to sort invoices. There was however variations to this monotonous rather boring work because the afternoons were spent in what was known as the Telegraph Office. It consisted of a small room with two telephones. I had to write down telegrams as they were dictated to me over the phone and prepare them for delivery. A simple task on the face of it, but you had to know how to spell and with handwriting as shocking as mine I found the job very stressful. In charge was Mr Blackman, an elderly gentleman brought back from retirement, who was very understanding and helpful. I suppose I did these jobs for a week or so and then came the biggest shock to the system that I had so far experienced. I came to work one morning to be told that I was to be put on counter duties from now on with overtime in the sorting office in the evenings. It was all work and no play. My friends had by now drifted away not to be seen again. All of the male counter staff had been conscripted into the Armed Forces. Those few remaining, who were assigned to the most senior duties, consisted of men over forty. The postmen were mainly veterans of the Great War. Several married women had been employed to fill the gaps. I was assigned to work on the counter selling stamps and paying pensions and allowances alongside a fat short-tempered woman with bad breath, she was supposed to teach me. For some reason she hated me and really gave me a hard time. I had to pick up what I could.

The most money I had ever seen up to then was a 10 shilling note that a generous relative had once given me. Now I had the responsibility of paying out several hundred pounds a day. It was a matter of work and more work. A far cry from the sunlit tennis courts, country walks and lying under bushes with my girl friend of a few months ago. By now the Blitz,

was ravaging London, just 22 miles from Hemel Hempstead. The air raid warning sounded most evenings and my nights were spent sleeping in the cellars below our house along with neighbours and whoever else could squeeze in. Work in the sorting office for some reason increased. Women staff were reluctant to work overtime in the evenings and consequently I found myself on duty sometimes at 6. 00 am through to 10. 00pm. I was not yet seventeen but shouldering the responsibilities normally given to men with years of experience. There was no respite at weekends either as I was obliged to join the Post Office Home Guard, which paraded on Sunday mornings in the Post Office yard. The Head Postmaster was the officer in charge of the contingent. I was issued with a military uniform complete with boots. I was also given a rifle, which I kept at home. I had never seen a gun in my life before and I was scared stiff of it. I still dislike guns intensely. Some Sunday evenings I also had to take my turn at fire watching on the flat roof at the back of the sorting office. There was not much time for fun and games or getting up to teenage pranks. Most of the time I was too tired for anything like that. I just had to get on with it. Dances and visits to the cinema with friends were out of the question. To rebel would have landed me in a great deal of trouble, not only at work but at home as well. The pay was, in today's terms, a mere pittance. I can't remember exactly how much but it wasn't much over £1 a week. It didn't really matter as there was very little to buy and most of it anyhow went to my mother for my keep.

Gradually the handling of money on the counter became second nature to me and I found the work enjoyable, especially the contact with the public. There were moments when the War came closer to us. Often at night, whilst sorting letters, the power would fail and we had to complete the sorting of evening mail by candlelight. After work I had to cycle home often in the pitch dark, as there was no street lighting, wearing a tin hat and carrying my gas mask. One wet winter evening I braked to avoid a bus that had stopped to pick up passengers, I skidded and landed underneath it, only to hear the bell ring as I lay there. Fortunately someone saw my plight and I was pulled from under the bus together with my bike just in time. A voice with a thick American accent came from the darkness and asked if I was OK. He had picked up my bike that somehow escaped from being crushed under the wheels of the bus. He wheeled it home for me and made sure that I was not injured before he left. For his good deed he got a cup of tea and a "thank you "from my father. I was told to check my brakes more often.

There was several of the older staff still left, Miss Miller, a spinster in her forties, Mr Loosemore who became Head Postmaster and Mr Cooper, a little very neat man with wonderful copperplate handwriting. Their duties were mostly on the supervisory level. As long as you did your work to the best of your ability they were happy and did nothing to interfere. The time for call up came closer. I was called for a medical examination to St Albans and asked for my preference. Army, Air Force or Navy. I really didn't have any choice as being in the Post Office I was destined for the Royal Corps of Signals. My eighteenth birthday arrived in September 1942 but the Post Office decided that my Call Up was to be deferred until after the end of the year so that I could help with the Christmas rush. Finally in January 1943 I received the letter telling me that I was to report to an Army training depot at Prestatyn, North Wales on the 3rd February.

Before I left for the Army I received the following letter from Mr Blackman the retired gentleman I had worked alongside when I first started work at the Post Office.

32 George Street

Hemel Hempstead

Feby 2nd 1943

Dear Mr (Pat) Smith

My best wishes go with you to the Army on Thursday and may it be a point of real opening for you, away from parcel pitching or letter sorting, even from the sound of a mechanised "telegrapher" so that when the War is over Hemel Hempstead may appear too small to hold your aims. I had hoped to have been able to wish you Good Fortune in person but as the doctor described it as this little fellow 'Germ Influenza' with his legions of Corpuscles following.

So once more my very best of wishes

Sincerely yours

A Blackman

On the morning of 3rd February 1943 dressed in my Home Guard uniform Dad drove Mother and I to Watford Junction for me to catch the train to North Wales. We said our good-byes, the first of many over the

next few years. Mother was very composed and kissed me farewell with little emotion but Dad needed a very large handkerchief to contain all his tears. Possibly he was reminded of his time in the Army in France 26 years previously and all that had happened to him, something which he never talked to me about. I had seen him cry before at the annual Remembrance Day Services, which affected him deeply. Probably though he was thinking of what might happen to me and would I return. Many years later Mother said that at the time he was so upset that she wondered if he would be able to drive home.

THE ARMY 1943

I arrived at Prestatyn some time after mid-day. It was a typical February day, cold and damp. Along with others who had been called up I marched from the Railway Station to the training camp, which occupied an old holiday camp. Our first hot meal was tripe and onions with boiled potatoes. Tripe was the one thing I loathed. Mother and Dad loved it and often had it for an evening meal. It always reminded me of stewed knitting. I could think of nothing more revolting. This was my first experience of being away from home on my own. I was already in uniform so did not have the joy of being kitted out. We were taken along to a shed and given what was called a palliasse, a cloth bag that we had to fill as full as possible with straw. This was to be our mattress. The rest of our bedding consisted of a pillow (no pillowcase) and two very rough course blankets. We were then herded like cattle, just as it was getting dark, into a hut where we were given a smallpox vaccination and several injections, for what we were not told. This was the first time I had had an injection of any kind. I half fainted at sight of the needle being administered and had to be held up when my turn arrived. After another meal we were allotted our bunks in a bleak wooden hut with a small stove in the middle. We put our palliasses onto our bunks, some of the chaps had filled theirs with more than enough straw and rolled off them, others were so thin that the wooden slats underneath could be felt. We were a varied mix of young men from all walks of life, most of us of the same age; I unpacked my pyjamas and got ready for bed. Others just took off their trousers and got into bed and some took all their clothes off and got beneath the blankets naked. Down the middle of the hut were several large pails, which I found later were our lavatories for the night. I must admit I found it very difficult having to perform alongside others with everyone else watching. There must have been thirty of us in the hut, quite an experience for I had very rarely had

to share my bedroom with anyone and then it was only my brother. It was a real culture shock. During the six weeks I was there we were taught how to march, to fire a rifle, stick a bayonet into a sack of straw and to throw a hand grenade. We had to throw the live grenades over a six-foot wall. I could only just make it. This was only just far enough and I proved to be a danger to everyone else. For safety's sake I was made to stand way back and just watch.

I had now been licked into some kind of shape and given a number. I was posted to Catterick Camp in North Yorkshire. We were housed in barracks with central heating and proper bathrooms. I was training to be a Wireless Operator with the Royal Corps of Signals and attended classes morning and afternoon with the weekends free. Most of my classmates were from a similar background to me. Military duties were of the minimum. This was more like a boarding school. Life here was very pleasant and the food was a great deal better than at Prestatyn. The course lasted for six months. I had to have two attempts at passing the final examination after which I was given two weeks leave. On my return I was posted to a camp just outside Lincoln. I was assigned to something called "Special Forces "None of us knew what this meant. After a week or so doing very little we were sent home for two weeks embarkation leave during which, on the 19th of September, I had my 19th birthday.

On return to camp we were kitted out with tropical uniform. By the look of it must have been left over from the 1914 - 1918 war. Orders were received to prepare to leave, for where we were not informed. After several hours by train we arrived at a dockside somewhere in England which turned out to be Liverpool. Someone recognised the Liver Birds! Alongside the quay was the former P&O liner Strathmore, the flagship of the P&O fleet, now converted to a troopship. The dazzling white paint had gone and she was now dull battleship grey.

A JOURNEY TO AN UNKNOWN DESTINATION

I had never seen a ship this size before. There was little time to stand and wonder. Carrying all our equipment, together with tin hat, rifle and gas mask we struggled up the gangplank to board. After what seemed to be a never ending decent down ladders and along endless passageways we arrived at large open space somewhere in the bowels of the ship. Down one side there was a row of narrow tables and benches all fixed to the deck. No bunks and no beds, so where on earth were we to sleep? We

were eventually told that stored in racks against the bulkheads were hammocks. Our rifles were taken from us for safe keeping and our kit was stowed in the racks above us wherever we could find space. It was a hot airless place with no outside ventilation and several not very bright lights, well below the water line. There must have been fifty or sixty of us young men down there without any idea of how to organise themselves. We shared two lavatories and two showers. Thus began my voyage into the unknown. We had no idea of where we were bound, or how long the voyage would take. All we knew was that we were going to somewhere hot. Everything, including our movements was shrouded in secrecy.

After a while we were allowed up on deck after the ship had got underway. Several hours later we hove to at a rendezvous with what we could only presume were a convoy of other ships. (I have since found out that this was somewhere off the West Coast of Scotland). It must have been a hilarious scene in our quarters as everyone prepared themselves for the night. Hammocks were taken from the racks and attempts were made to sling them and if successful to get into them. I failed miserably and found myself a quiet corner on the bottom of one of the racks where I unrolled my hammock and covered myself with a blanket. The lights were dimmed the laughing and bantering stopped and sixty half-naked young men attempted to sleep.

I woke up. The whole place was moving violently. The hammocks above me were swinging in unison. My stomach was churning and I knew that at any moment the stew that I had eaten the previous evening was going to see the light of day again. Unsteadily I made my way to the lavatory. It was packed with others on a similar mission. I remember very little after that and had a vague notion of being dragged back to bed in the rack. There I stayed, apart from sporadic visits to the lavatory, for several days. I had never felt so ill in my life. My head was spinning with the constant movement of the ship which seemed to increase, not that I was very aware of anything much except the feeling that I was going to die at any time.

Eventually after what seemed endless days I gradually recovered and began to feel more human. The violent movement of the ship eased and I resumed a normal existence. My bed was still on the rack. I never did get the hang of sleeping in a hammock. We ordinary soldiers were allowed up on one of the decks, and on one evening when the air was warm and the sea calm I had my first glimpse of the Rock of Gibraltar bathed in

floodlight. The adventure was beginning. I knew where I was now and had an idea as to where the voyage would end.

By this time Malta had been relieved of the constant bombardment from the Luftwaffe. Sicily had been liberated and the Mediterranean was considered fairly safe for shipping. We sailed on through the calm blue sea enjoying the freedom to laze in the autumn sunshine. A friend, by the name of Willie Gow, and I were on deck one evening watching the sunset, the turmoil and rough seas forgotten. Suddenly the sky lit up with what looked to us to be some kind of firework display. Out of the sunset came a plane, which we thought was coming to take a look at us. The ship's sirens sounded and we were ordered below decks. This was an emergency!

Once below decks we were instructed to get down from the racks above our tin hats and great coats, which we then had to put on. We sat round the mess tables awaiting our fate. We realised then that we were under attack by the Luftwaffe. The ship began to vibrate alarmingly and we could feel her beginning to pick up speed. Suddenly there was a massive explosion, the lid of the airshaft, which provided us with fresh air from above, crashed down. All the lights went out. This was IT what chance was there for us of ever surviving if the ship went down as we sat hampered by heavy coats and wearing tin hats in the bowels of the vessel. There was complete silence as we awaited our fate. The ship continued to vibrate and you could feel the surge forward. Then the lights came on and amid cheering tin hats and overcoats were returned to the racks overhead. We were still alive. For the time being we were ordered to stay where we were and not to venture up on deck.

Next morning as soon as we could we made our way up out into the sunshine. Our ship was on her own. Her speed had taken us away from the convoy and any further risk of enemy attack. Much later, after the war, I learnt that our convoy, the first through the Mediterranean since the beginning of hostilities, had been severely mauled and had sustained serious casualties. How lucky we had been. There was little for us to do except attend dreary lectures on the dangers of life in the tropics and how the women of the area we were going to (wherever that was) should be avoided at all costs. Graphic pictures shown on a screen illustrated to us the consequences if we strayed. For most of us whose knowledge of sexual matters was about on the level of today's 10-year-olds it was enough to cool any ardour that we had. We sailed on and arrived at Port Said where we docked. Going ashore was not permitted but we were

treated to a little local entertainment. Several Egyptian "Gulli Gulli Men" arrived and moved little metal cups with newly hatched chicks under them around on our mess tables. We had to guess which cup the chick was under. What fun! We spent a great deal of the time leaning on rails looking at the dockyard activity which consisted of loading the ship with fresh vegetables and other provisions for the remainder of the voyage.

Then commenced the most interesting part of the trip - the journey through the Suez Canal.

It is difficult to remember just how long it took, but I think it probably took us two days as we anchored for the night in some lakes half way through. The first few hours were hilarious to say the least. We were all crowded up on deck looking at nothing but the desert when there suddenly along the top of the bank appeared dozens of naked black men all with huge erections running shouting and dancing, the ribald remarks from the troops are unprintable. The naked black men disappeared as quickly as they had arrived. That was about all the excitement we had. As the canal made its way through the desert it was amazing to see ships in the distance, as they appeared to be making their way through the desert sands. Then finally we were into the Red Sea.

The heat especially down below in our quarters was stifling. The nights were unbearable; none of us had ever experienced such heat. The only thing we could think of to get cool was to change into our tropical kit, but that wasn't much help either. Some took to sleeping up on deck but that was not encouraged. The rest of the voyage was uneventful except for one or two submarine alerts. We steamed on our way to our final destination which we now all assumed to be India.

"MY BIKE HAS NO BRAKES"

I was busy sorting the evening mail when the air raid warning sounded. It was about eight o'clock. We took little notice of the sirens and continued dealing with the piles of letters that had come in. It had been a busy day and I had had nothing to eat since leaving the counter when it closed at half past six. We were short of staff; working twelve hours a day every day of the week, it had been like this for months. Not much fun for a young chap I was too tired even to go to the pictures, as for girls you could forget them. Despite the war there was no lack of work. The local factories were working at full tilt and it was expected that all their correspondence would catch the night mail. No one spoke, as you had to concentrate and mistakes were not tolerated even if you were tired and hungry. By ten o'clock" ' you would be worn out and fighting to keep awake and then have to face a cycle ride home in the pitch dark of the blackout.

There was a distant drone of aircraft," Sounds as if the Gerries are over London again",' then the odd rumble, probably a bomb. They never seemed to reach Hemel, even though we were only twenty-two miles away from the City. Nothing much to bomb. The baskets of letters were beginning to empty; maybe we'd get home early for a change. A deafening explosion as they were put into their pigeonholes broke the quiet swish of envelopes, the whole building shook and we were in darkness. All was still. There was no panic and within minutes candles were found and placed in saucers, which were brought from the staff kitchen. We searched for our tin hats from under the sorting frames, put them on and continued to deal with the mail in the flickering light. " I wonder who has copped it? Sounded quite close" At last all the letters were sorted, the mailbags tied up ready for the station and the night train for Birmingham and beyond.

I dreamt of a late supper, a fried egg, a bit of bacon if there was any of the ration left and hopefully" 'a slice of fried bread", 'but most of all a cup of tea and then thankfully to bed. No time to listen to the wireless" 'as I had to be up at five the next morning and back to supervise the opening of the morning mail, the street deliveries and then counter duties at half past eight. All this and remember I was only seventeen.

I got my Mac from the cloakroom, collected my cycle lamp from my locker and went out into the damp cold of a November night. I took my bike from the rack at the rear of the Post Office and set off for home about half a mile away. The lamp shed a dim light on the dark road ahead; there were

no cars and very few people about at this time of night. All I could think about was food and my bed. I hoped it wouldn't be another night for us in the cellar. As I reached the end of Marlowes; the main street in the town, a bus loomed up in the darkness in front of me stopping to pick up the last customers from the Waggon and Horses. I pulled on my brakes sharply. Nothing happened. I just missed hitting the back of the bus, skidded and found myself lying on the wet road underneath it. Out of the darkness I heard the bell ring and the engine revving up. I was going to die. Then I heard a voice shout in a thick Yankee drawl Get him out, get him out". As I was dragged from under the bus the back wheel brushed past my hair. There was a sickening crunch, as my bike became a twisted heap of metal. It could have been me. A Yank came out of the darkness picked me up and sat me on the curb and asked" You OK boy? Come I'll take you home. "

It was not too far to go, 'my legs were shaking'. My American friend took me right to the front door. He knocked and with a brief word explained what has happened. Father invited him in. He was a good-looking fellow not much older than I was. He was thanked for his quick thinking and given the meal that I had been expecting, egg bacon and fried bread. Tired and hungry 'and still shocked from my fall' all I wanted to do was have something to eat and go to bed but not before Dad had given me a thorough lecture on the dangers of riding a bike with no brakes. Yes I did get something to eat after all that - some bread and plum jam and a dish of cold rice pudding left over from dinner. How I hate the skin on rice pudding but it did taste good that night. And yes there was just enough tea left in the pot.

INDIA 1943 – 1946

We docked early in the morning at Bombay and tied up at the quayside. After breakfast we were instructed to change into our full tropical kit complete with topee. What we looked like it is hard to imagine, the clothes I am sure must have been left over from before the 1st World War. We just sat waiting to disembark. The excited chatter ceased as two enamel plates were slapped down on each mess table. We must be getting some sweets or possibly biscuits I thought. The plates were passed down and we were told to take two packets each. There was sniggering and general hilarity about what we had been given. I had no idea what the small envelopes contained. Inside were condoms, (we called them French Letters!) the first I had seen. I knew about them and their use so why I thought should I need them. I put mine back on the plate, they were certainly not for me.

The next week was spent at the military base of Mhow outside Bombay. The barrack blocks were depressing and intimidating made from grey granite and possibly well over a hundred years old. At least they were cool and helped us to acclimatise. It was here that I had my first experience of homesickness. I had been split from the people I had been travelling with and was now with strangers. I was completely on my own and missing my family. What was going to happen to me, where was I going? All I could think of was home and how far away it all was from this alien place. I felt really ill and there was no one I could tell my troubles to. Then things started to move. Me and several others known as members of Special Forces (whatever they were) were told that, we were to be seconded to the West African Frontier Force. After what seemed like endless boring days of lectures on how to behave as white men in India we were eventually taken to a railway siding to join them. Here we found a train assembled ready to leave. The carriages were long wooden affairs with small balconies at either end, unlike those in England. They were packed with very black African soldiers. These were the first Africans I had ever come across. They were a fierce looking bunch many of them well over six feet tall with tattooed faces and filed teeth. We pale; thin insignificant looking white boys all just a little over 19 were each allocated a carriage full of these warriors who looked as if they could devour us at one sitting. We were to be in charge of them for the length of the rail journey. We were not informed of how long it would take or what was to be our final destination. The inside of the carriage was open with wooden benches on either side of an aisle. At the end of the coach there was a

larger wooden bench which ran the whole width of the vehicle. This I was told was for me. In charge of the men was an African Sergeant who was in turn to be responsible to me. In fact he looked after me as well as his men. He saw that my kit was stowed away and ordered one of the men to make my bed. This was a new experience for me. I was waited on and treated with the utmost courtesy for the whole journey across the Indian sub- continent. It was a slow journey taking ten days. There was ample time to take in the country as we ambled along sometimes stopping for hours for no apparent reason. As soon as the train came to a standstill we would be surrounded by crowds of beggars, from tiny children to wrinkled old men and women, who appeared from nowhere. I cannot remember being upset or appalled by this display of such abject poverty and squalor that surrounded us. Everything was so different to anything that I had ever seen before. It was only years later that the significance of what I had experienced became real to me. Our journey ended in a tea estate in the North East corner of India, where it was, or what it was called I have no idea. We camped, if that is the word, on the banks of a river that ran through the estate. We carved shelters out of the bushes and slept in the open. Fortunately it was the dry season and fairly warm. The person in charge of us was a Company Sergeant Major who had a penchant for young men. The five of us boys made sure he kept his distance. The Africans, meanwhile, went on the rampage and reports drifted in that they had attacked the tea pickers living quarters abducting several of the women. We members of the Royal Signals were soon transferred away from this mayhem and taken further on near to the India - Burma border. Here we joined what was known as the Chindits.

Special Forces as we were also called had been set up to send in troops behind the Japanese lines to disrupt their advances within the jungle and into India. The training that we now underwent was rigorous and exhausting. We were taught how to handle mules on which we had to load our wireless equipment complete with batteries and chargers. We were to be flown in behind enemy lines to provide communications with the outside world for the columns of troops in action there. During this time General Orde Wingate who was in command of the operation visited us. He struck us a very “odd bod “indeed.

The final days of training were completed and we were paraded to be inspected by a senior officer. He had red taps on his collar so he must have been fairly important. He came down the ranks (there must have

been forty or fifty men) talking to each person in turn. When he reached my friend Wally Bloor and me, we were the radio operators for this detachment; he asked us our ages to which we replied "just nineteen". He turned to the officers who were with him and said that these two men were far too young to go in behind enemy lines and must be given other duties. Much to our dismay and disappointment we were assigned to the base camp.

Wally and I and several others who we had met up with were assigned to a wireless station which had been set up on the perimeter of an airstrip manned by Americans from which Dakota aircraft flew taking supplies to be dropped to the insurgency columns. We were to maintain communications with these columns who were to infiltrate the Japanese lines in Northern Burma. We had two long bamboo thatched huts, one to house our equipment and to work in, the other to live, eat and sleep in. They had been constructed by the local Indians and were similar to their own huts. Our beds were wooden crates scrounged from the Americans on the airstrip. Someone we employed from the area cooked our food which was sourced from local produce. The climate was very hot and sticky. Our clothing for most of the time was just a towel tucked around our waist. It rained a great deal of the time and the humidity was very high. We worked in the radio room in 12-hour shifts. It was hard work trying to listen to faint Morse signals through a barrage of interference from tropical storms and attempts by the Japanese at blocking the wavelengths we were working on. Often the wires leading from the aerials which came down through the thatched roof crackled and sparked, especially during the numerous thunderstorms. The messages that we received were in code so we had no idea as to their content. On the odd occasion we received messages in plain language. We knew from things that were said that conditions behind enemy lines were very difficult and that there were significant losses. During this time we had a visitor of some note. It was a very wet evening with the rain bucketing down and we were told to gather under some trees a short distance from our hut. We waited patiently in the rain. A lorry arrived and from the cab out stepped a young lady dressed in khaki uniform. She had come to entertain us. Someone I had vaguely heard of - Vera Lynn, not my favourite singer I am afraid. The back of the lorry was let down and a tarpaulin erected over the tailgate. From the inside a battered piano appeared and the concert began. We cheered and clapped after all Vera had come thousands of miles and the conditions were appalling.

Soon after our commander General Orde Wingate was killed in an air crash and the Chindit operation, having achieved some success, was wound down. Wally Bloor and I asked if we could have some leave and cadged a lift on an American Dakota aircraft to Calcutta for a couple of weeks. How we were going to get back we had no idea. We managed to find ourselves a hostel run by a Roman Catholic organisation. We went along to several dances that they arranged. There were lots of what we thought were Welsh girls in the hall. It turned out that they were in fact Anglo-Indians (Eurasians). Not really the sort of company that white people associated with in those days. Anyhow we had had a break and now had to try and make our way back. As far as I can remember we took a train from Calcutta to somewhere on the Brahmaputra River where we boarded a steamer that took us up stream to where we boarded another train. Several days later we arrived back at base after quite an adventure. The Special Forces operation was now over.

With time on our hands I was despatched by jeep with my own driver to investigate a route for possible mail transport to the town of Imphal. It was a horrendous journey over tracks and through forests. On my return I was ill for sometime. After this I was sent on a similar expedition, this time by train, taking a dummy mailbag. Wally and I were given a jeep and a driver, why we were granted this privileged I don't know. We drove to a place that is reputedly the wettest place on the planet, Cherripungi. It was on the edge of an escarpment and rained incessantly the whole time we were there. Eventually we were dispersed to various places and I ended up in Gwalior an Indian State not far from New Delhi.

This was a far cry from my previous location. Here the remnants of the Chindits HQ awaited new postings. The accommodation was in proper barracks, the food was good and the climate was a lot cooler. I was still operating radio links, this time using American equipment. There was plenty to keep us occupied. Again we younger men were pestered by older men (regular soldiers, mostly senior NCOs) seeking sexual favours and we were constantly on guard, especially during the day when sleeping after night shift. I found this very disturbing.

About twenty or so of us, for our own amusement, formed a dramatic group. It was a mixture of all ranks. We gave our one performance outside the camp to a group of students at a local college. The principal was an Englishman married to an Indian lady. We did excerpts from Shakespeare, these were the only plays readily available to us, and the students were

studying several of them. Our acting was greatly appreciated. As a result several of us were invited to an evening meal by the Principal and his wife and family. The meal was served outside by candlelight all of us sitting on the grass and was entirely Indian. It was a great experience.

Chindit Dramatic Society 1945

I cannot recollect how long I was in Gwalior but again the time had come to move on. Volunteers were asked to join an Indian Airborne Division that was in the process of being formed. They were looking for glider pilots, which I thought, may be something worth doing away from the boring tapping of a Morse key. So I put my name forward. I had a medical and passed. I knew little about what glider pilots did apart from flying gliders. When the call came to move to the training area it was not to become glider pilot but to carry on my occupation as a wireless operator. Once a member of the Royal Signals always a member. I knew nothing about the glider participation in the D-Day landings or the Arnhem assault. If I had done so maybe I would not have been so keen to become a glider pilot. I found myself at a camp in the district of Bilaspur central India.

Here we had numerous exercises to prepare ourselves for the invasion of which I have since learnt was to be Singapore. There were regular flights with our radios and their support apparatus in what were fragile looking gliders made from what appeared to be bicycle tubing covered

with canvas. If you were not careful it was easy to put your rifle through the side of the craft. We were towed by Dakotas over miles of dense jungle and then cast off to glide back to an airstrip. In between this activity I ran a company office and looked after administration and the weekly pay, not that we had anything to spend our money on. There was a quiet spell in the August of 1945 and I managed to wangle two weeks leave in New Delhi to visit my friend George whom I had been with in Gwalior. It was a pleasant break back in civilisation. We visited the Red Fort and many other places of interest whose names escape me. On Sunday evening we attended Evensong at Delhi's parish church; it was almost like being back in England. Then the atom bombs were dropped on Japan and we celebrated VJ Day. At last the war was over, but not our army service.

Back at the camp outside Bilsapur training ceased and there was very little to keep us occupied, life was very boring indeed. On the 19th of September 1945 I celebrated my 21st birthday. I was given a bottle of local gin, which I believe came from the Officers' Mess together with some bits and pieces to eat. With a couple of my Royal Signal companions we had a small party in the mess tent. The gin, which we consumed between us, must have been really rough as I was out for the count for at least two days afterwards. I have never felt so ill and the smell of gin made me feel nauseous for many years after. The whole operation was gradually disbanded. Those of us forming the Royal Signals section were sent to Karachi to bide our time, Waiting for possible repatriation and future demobilisation - we hoped!

By some stroke of luck, call it what you will, I was assigned to run the Company Office there and worked with Captain Donald who was not a great deal older than me. Rank did not appear to be a barrier and we became friends. I was allowed to establish myself in a corner of the Office and use it as my quarters. It was at this time that I met Tom Law a sergeant in the cipher section (I was just a lowly Signalman); promotion of any kind had escaped me. I was obviously not cut out to be a leader of men. Tom and I came from similar backgrounds, both family wise and as far as education was concerned. We had a great deal in common. We had both been brought up in the Church of England and sung in Church choirs, we both were very fond of classical music. Drink did not form part of our culture, not that we didn't like the odd glass occasionally. In our time off we went to a forces club in Karachi. A lovely colonial house set in extensive grounds, which were beautifully maintained. Reasonable

food was always available at a fair price, there were lounges where we could sit and read, a good library, and something that pleased us both, the opportunity to listen to good music. There were often classical concerts given by means of gramophone records and on one memorable occasion a piano recital by the renowned pianist Solomon. For us it was home from home a very civilised place in which to relax and get away from the military presence that surrounded us. On Sunday mornings Tom was in the position to obtain a jeep and a driver to take us to Holy Trinity church in Karachi for Holy Communion. We did this most Sundays and sometimes called at the Club for breakfast on the way back. The sea was within walking distance of where we were stationed and afforded us a pleasant swim in the Gulf of Arabia. This was a very enjoyable time for both of us and a friendship was formed that still exists, if only today in the exchange of Christmas cards.

Pat and Tom Law, Karachi 1946

Pat, Karachi 1946

During this time both Tom and I came back to England on 4 weeks leave which plus the journey Home and back by sea gave us a considerable break. Tom on his leave met a girl who was to be his future wife. We talked about this all night on the day he returned to Karachi. I had to wait for several years before I was so lucky. How fortunate we were to have such an enjoyable end to our time in India.

The time came for our return. I had collected a large collection of books and as I was due to return to England by ship it was no problem as there was no limit on the amount of baggage we could take. At the last moment we as airborne troops were given the option of returning by air if we wished. I jumped at the opportunity. The only problem was that there was a strict limit on the luggage we could take. I had to dump the majority of my precious books. There was little time for me to prepare for the flight. I had one whale of a party before we left. When the time came to board I was still extremely worse for wear and was virtually carried onto the plane. It was a York transport plane fitted with seats, a chemical lavatory and that was about all. None of the trimmings that we are used to today. Our first stop was for refuelling in the early morning, at Basra. We had to disembark and I was feeling very under the weather. I remember leaning against the undercarriage. It was freezing cold, it helped sober me up. The next leg of the journey took us to Cairo where we were taken to a hotel in the Cairo suburb of Heliopolis. This was a luxury that was new to me. I had not been into a hotel before. There were maids to run baths for us and to turn our beds down. They complained because we ran around with little more than a hand towel to hide our modesty and we were asked to behave. After just over 3 years without the company of women we had forgotten what modesty was. The restaurant where we ate even had menus, napkins and the full silver service. All this at the Army's expense and we were just other ranks. I had fully recovered from my binge by then and enjoyed every moment of it. After a great breakfast and getting stuck in a rather ancient lift I just made the plane. We took off and circled the pyramids and made our way at a sedate pace to Malta where we spent another night. This time, to our dismay no hotel but a well used Air force camp. We were taken into Valetta for the evening and warned of the perils of the ladies of the night. With no money to spend, who anyhow would want Indian Rupees? We wandered around the quaint streets of the town and made our way back to camp. Early the next morning we took off for our final destination - England.

We landed at an Air force base in the Southwest. Another new experience awaited me. Some of us were picked at random to run the Customs gauntlet. It was just my luck to be chosen. Before leaving Tom had given me a watch as a present for his brother. I had just wrapped it in some socks and put it in a mess tin to avoid any damage. Tom had paid quite a bit for it. I must have appeared shifty, or the Custom's officers were feeling officious that day, because I was singled out for a thorough search. I can only think that they were looking for pornography of which India was awash. We had all read the full version of Lady Chatterley's Lover. I can assure you they didn't find any in my belongings. The mess tin shined like a beacon as it emerged from my kit bag. It was seized upon; the socks unravelled and there laid the watch. I felt very humbled as I was informed that I was breaking the law in an attempt to smuggle goods into the country. I explained the situation but there were no kind hearts that day. For my sins I was told to strip and every part of my body was searched. I stood there sure that I was to be detained. I was told to dress and repack my kit. After a debate among the staff I was told I could keep the watch if I paid Customs £5. They took what little money I had and I was told to go. What a welcome back! I rushed outside and found a coach waiting to take us to London. They had decided to give me a few more minutes before leaving. I was not very popular. It was a cold autumn day and we were all in tropical uniform and the coach had no heating.

We eventually arrived in London where we were put into a requisitioned hotel somewhere near St Pancras station. I rang home to say I was back. There was a little confusion as a few days earlier they had received a letter from me saying I was sailing from Bombay later in the month. I was not allowed home on leave but had to report to a Royal Signals depot in Yorkshire who would then make arrangements. So ended my Indian adventure.

I was very fortunate indeed as my War, although uncomfortable at times, ended without any injury or damage to my health. I had seen some fascinating and exotic places experienced a culture far removed from that of a small English town. My horizons had been broadened and a longing to see more of the world had been engendered. Most important of all I had learned to live with other people and respect their opinions. Now would come more changes that would determine the rest of my life.

POEMS WRITTEN IN INDIA 1943-1946

On return to India after leave in England

1946

I've seen my England once again
in soft spring sunshine and the rain of early April.
I've seen a tree in early leaf
Shedding its cloak of wintry grief.

I've felt soft turf beneath my feet
When over the fields I've run to meet a dawning day.
All this I did in that dear month, and more;
An exiled child returned to England's shore.

REMEMBER THE DAY

Remember the day when you came back
How we talked and talked and then lost track of the time?
So full you were of the recent past
And the beautiful mystic spell it had cast
Round a life that had been so dull.

You had achieved a new height,
You had found a new light
That illumed a burning desire
That had been stirred by the breeze of a girl;
Into flames that did whirl round your heart, your brain,
And the tip of your tongue.
Thank God we are young!
It created envy deep down in my breast
Reviving and ever eternal zest to be loved and to love.
But in vain

In 1946 Tom Law, a great friend of mine in Karachi, had been on a months leave to England and whilst there had met Margaret who had swept him off his feet. They eventually married in 1950. He arrived back in Karachi from Bombay late one night. For some reason I happen to be on duty in the Company Office and he called into see me. He had to tell me about his leave and the wonderful girl that he had met. We talked continuously until the early hours of the morning.

I wondered if anything like this would happen to me. Sometime during the next day I wrote this. Tom has never seen this, I doubt if he ever will.

THE FUTURE

(This was written sometime during my service in India; 1943-1946. Obviously I was homesick.)

Oh! Come the time when I can climb
To the top a hill and take my fill
Of a view that is new.

To roam on my own with the gentle moan
Of a breeze in the trees.

To sit by the shore and hear the sea roar
And see the gulls ride on the incoming tide.

To lie by a stream and see the fish gleam
With a silvery hue alternating to blue.

To walk in the dark and silently hark
To the rustle of grass that parts as I pass.

RETURN TO CIVILIAN LIFE 1946 – 1948

Now back in England the Army authorities were, I am sure, at a loss to know what to do with us. Still in tropical uniform I travelled by train from London to somewhere near York. It was a chilly October day and on arrival the first thing to do was to get some warm clothing. The following morning along with several others I was called to the Detachment office to receive a posting. The person sitting behind the desk was none other than a Warrant Officer who had been in charge of the West African Frontier Force Company to which I was seconded soon after my arrival in India. He was someone to be avoided, young men were his quarry and he was a predator of the first order. I had thankfully always managed to avoid his advances. Now four years later here I was face to face with him across a desk and it was he who would decided where I was to go. Knowing how I had outwitted him I expected a rough posting. Much to my great suprise I couldn't have asked for anything better. I was to report to the Royal Signals Records Office at Caversham, Reading. This was home from home - Aunt Phyll and Joyce lived there. On arrival I was able, with no difficulty, to arrange to board with them. It was quite some distance to Caversham from Earley where I was staying, but transport was good and there was no problem in getting too and from my work. The job assigned to me was interesting and I was, for the first time in years, away from a military environment. It was good to be among civilian workers who were mainly girls of my own age. After several years without female companionship this was a little daunting. I soon got used to it however and became friendly with a pleasant girl, Eunice Fox. Nothing serious developed, just tea on Sundays with Aunt Phyll and Joyce and tea with Eunice's parents visits to the pictures and the odd meal in town at an Italian restaurant.

Christmas came and I went home. It was 1946 and my first Christmas with the family since 1942. There were the usual festivities on Christmas Day and on Boxing Day all the relatives came around, as they usually did, for the traditional party. After a large tea I had to excuse myself from the merriment in the front room, all these people whom I knew and hadn't seen for so long were too much for me to deal with. I just couldn't face them all at the one time. Mother was quite worried about me. It was difficult for her to understand how I felt, however, I soon managed to recover. I can't remember Dad being concerned.

The winter of 1947 was the worst for many years. The snow and ice lasted from January to March with little break; it was bitterly cold. Life

at 6 Betchworth Avenue Earley was warm, comfortable and I was well looked after. Travelling to and from work in the dark together with the severe weather made me long for the sunnier climes I had become used to. Over the coming months my assignment at the Records Office gradually wound down and became boring with very little to do. The occasional visit back home to Hemel Hempstead helped to break the monotony. Demobilisation seemed slow in coming. At last I was given a date in July.

It was up to Yorkshire again where I was formally discharged, kitted out with civilian clothes and sent on my way. Here I was back to where I had started out from on the 3rd February 1943. Times had changed. I was now almost 23 and had been used to living a fairly independent life not subject to having to inform people of my movements and where I was going. I had money of my own now as on leaving the Army had given me a gratuity of £200 and the Post Office had paid me a little during the years I was away. I had four weeks leave before I was due to report back to the Post Office in Hemel Hempstead to start work. Time was my own. Life back at 64 Lawn Lane was difficult. My young sister Anne was a precocious seven year old, spoilt and to me totally obnoxious. John, my brother, was living with Aunt Con, as there was no room at the house for him. I don't think the thought of moving out of the parental home ever entered my head. There was a severe shortage of accommodation anyhow. I just had to stick it out.

During the four weeks I had to spare I visited London several times and decided that I would buy myself a decent suit. Off I went to Austin Reed in Regents Street to get myself measured. It was a hot August day and I set out wearing lightweight slacks I had made for me in Karachi, an open necked shirt and sandals with no socks. Arriving at the tailoring department a rather austere looking assistant said, "How do you expect me to measure you dressed like that? " He managed – the result was a suit made especially for me with my name sewn into the inside jacket pocket. A bit expensive for those days costing £25. It was worth it though. Dad said he thought I had expensive tastes! It was certainly in a class of its own compared with my "demob" suit. Little did I know then but I would be wearing it on my wedding day in Bulawayo in October 1949.

The day came for me to start work back at the Post Office in Hemel Hempstead. I was to serve on the counters. First of all I had to take over a stock of stamps and Postal Orders. I had almost forgotten what they looked like and I found it very difficult. Other members of staff who had recently returned from military service helped me and I gradually eased

myself back into the work. It wasn't too bad after all. About this time Jean, who had been transferred from the Post Office in Stowmarket, Suffolk entered my life. She came into the counters to cash her pay cheque and we got talking and it was apparent that we were meant for each other. We were very much in love. My current girl friend at the time, Barbara, was unfortunately left by the wayside. It was good being back dealing with people and getting to know them again and life began to move on. Where was I going though? I became restless and began looking for opportunities to leave Hemel Hempstead. Warmer climates beckoned and meanwhile the relationship between Jean and me deepened and we became engaged to be married. The opportunity for change came in the latter half of 1948 when I applied for a post in the Southern Rhodesian Post Office. My application was successful. Jean and I were both excited at the prospect of a new life in another part of the world and planned that when I had settled she would follow me and we would get married. Jean had never been abroad but she was determined to go. The power of our love for each other was very strong and the prospect of going into the unknown did nothing to daunt our ambitions. Perhaps we were headstrong, and we certainly didn't seek any advice or ask our parents feelings on the matter. Looking back possibly we should have done. Nothing was ever said to us about their feelings. I often wonder what our reaction would have been if they had objected to our plans. But they didn't.

Jean and Pat engagement, 1948

SOUTHERN RHODESIA 1949 –1966 (Part I)

"The granite of the Ancient North
Great Spaces washed with sun"
(Rudyard Kipling)

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

The previous ten years had brought about great changes in my life. I had progressed from a 15 year old school boy at Hemel Hempstead Grammar School to a much-travelled young man of 24. My horizons had been extended far beyond the confines of my hometown. I had travelled the oceans, albeit not in luxury, seen places that I had only read about, flown over the dense jungles of India, mixed with people from different cultures. Suffered from homesickness, from seasickness, from loneliness and from hunger. Eaten food whose ingredients I never knew existed. I had even eaten python steaks. I had found myself in situations beyond anything that I could ever have imagined. And I had met Jean from Stowmarket in Suffolk who became to mean more to me than anyone I had ever known.

The claustrophobia of confined family life, the restricted almost Victorian attitude to work that prevailed in the Post Office and the drab surroundings of post war Britain made me feel the need to get away from it all. I was missing the bright sunshine and the warm climate to which I had become attached and longed for the freedom to live my own life away from parental authority and members of my family with whom I did not get on.

In the early months of 1948 various notices appeared in Post Office staff publication advertising for young men to fill vacancies in the Postal Services of Commonwealth countries. Among these was a request from the Post Office in Southern Rhodesia. My first application was for a post in Southern Rhodesia, which I submitted in March 1948. It was unsuccessful. Jean and I decided that, even though we knew very little about the country, this was the place for us. We doubted though that there would be any more requests for staff as advertisements were rarely repeated. October came and Jean and I decided to get engaged. We had no definite plans but in the back of our minds there was still a hope that something

would turn up and it did. In November another notice appeared, but then I just couldn't make up my mind whether or not to apply. The deadline for applications to be in grew nearer. Having endlessly discussed the matter with Jean I was still unable to arrive at a conclusion. There were now just two days to go.

I arrived home late one evening, the house was in darkness, the fire had gone out and I was cold and tired. Everyone was in bed. I knew that I had to do something immediately or I would be unable to sleep. I went into the front room searching for some paper and an envelope. I found an envelope tucked in a drawer but no writing paper. On the desk was my young sister Anne's exercise book just as she had left it after doing her homework with everything ready for the following morning. In haste I tore a page from the back of the book and scribbled out my application put it into the tired looking envelope and went to bed. It took me all of five minutes to write that letter. My application was accepted but one question that often bothered me –is why was that badly presented letter that was written on such a scruffy piece of paper accepted. ?

Our plans for the future together had begun to materialize and I was about to take the first steps on what was to prove to be a long journey.

THURSDAY the 21st JANUARY 1949

Thursday the 21st January 1949 was a grey damp day, muggy and close for that time of the year. I was once more about to take a step into the unknown. Little was said as we packed my suitcase into the boot of the car outside 64 Lawn Lane. My cabin trunk with my books, gramophone records, a portable wind-up gramophone and the majority of my possessions had been sent by rail to Southampton a few days before. Over the past six years I had said my good-byes to my parents many times over never knowing if and when I would see them again. Today it was very different. If all went as planned Jean was to follow me later in the year.

There was an uneasy silence among us as we, Mum Dad Jean and I, started our journey, what was there to say? We drove from Hemel Hempstead up to London through the damp and bleak suburbs, which still bore the ominous signs of the Blitz. Finally, with time to spare, we arrived at Waterloo Station where I was to catch the 10. 30am boat train to Southampton. After parking the car we made our way onto the platform. A sign at the entrance gate to the platform read "Athlone Castle" the liner on which I was to travel to Cape Town. Mum and Dad said their

good-byes, perhaps a little sadly, but showing no indication as to how they felt about my leaving. Jean and I made our way down the platform through the billowing clouds of steam coming from the carriages. I took my luggage, found a seat and stood by the carriage door. We said little to each other; Jean tried hard not to cry but there were latent tears in her eyes as we said our final good-byes. How long would it be before we were together again or would one us of change our mind? Would our plans melt away as we both went our separate ways? The guard blew the whistle; we withdrew from our last embrace. I lent out of the carriage window waving farewell and as the train left the station Jean disappeared into the gloom and smoke of the station. I was on my way to a new life in the sunshine and warmth of Southern Rhodesia. To a new beginning away from the drab and dreary environment of post war Britain with all its restrictions, shortages and miserable climate.

It was a dreary journey to Southampton. I sat in the corner of my half-empty compartment, deep in thought, wondering whether I had done the right thing. After boarding the Athlone Castle and finding my cabin in the tourist section I unpacked my suitcase and lay on the bottom bunk. Jean was very much in my thoughts I was now eager for the voyage to begin. I wondered who my companion would be for the next two weeks; maybe he would be someone else joining the Post Office in Southern Rhodesia. The door opened and a very slim young man poked his head round and enquired in a strong Northern Ireland accent whether this was the right cabin. I introduced myself and told him where I was going. He was just 18 years of age. It was his first time away from Belfast and he was already missing his home and family. We were both new recruits bound for the Post Office in Bulawayo. His name was Billy Haliday, I took him under my wing and for the next two weeks he treated me as his older brother. He had very little money and I paid most of his expenses with little hope of reimbursement.

The voyage to Cape Town was uneventful but a great deal more comfortable than the previous ones I had experienced on troopships. The food wasn't bad, the accommodation a bit worn and shabby and the company really not very inspiring. Billy and I chatted to one or two nurses also bound for Southern Rhodesia and passed the time of day. They were about my age, but a bit young for Billy. A fortnight after leaving Southampton we arrived in Cape Town early in the morning to be greeted by the magnificent view of Table Mountain. We were met by representatives from the Rhodesia

Government who confirmed our destination as Bulawayo. Tickets for our train journey and meals on the way were provided. Our train was due to leave at eight o'clock that same evening. We had almost six or seven hours to spare and Billy was at a loss to know what to do with all this time on his hands and with no money to spend in this strange and colourful city. I suggested we go into the town. We did a bit of sightseeing and were fascinated by the shops with all their variety of goods on display. On stalls at the side of the road were mountains of fruit for sale. I had never seen such a variety, not even in India. For the lack of something better to do that afternoon we ended up in a cinema where trays of tea and cakes were passed to us in the dark. At first we were puzzled at what was taking place. Tea in the cinema, whatever next. Ice cream and chocolate yes but not tea and a slice of cake on a tray.

We eventually arrived at Cape Town station with about an hour to spare before the train for Bulawayo left at eight o'clock. Billy and I met up with the nurses we had talked to on the voyage. They were also killing time. We all decided that it would be a good idea to go to the station bar and have a quiet drink. As we walked in the place became silent, the babble of conversation ceased and all eyes were fixed on us. "There's no women allowed in here man," someone shouted to us from the crowd around the bar. We all beat a hasty retreat and found a seat on the platform. I decided I would like some grapes and bought a large bunch, which we all shared. I think I must have had the lion's share.

I had undertaken many long train journeys during my time in India and settled down to enjoy this one from Cape Town to Rhodesia in the heart of Africa. I now had the added comfort of first class travel and the luxury of a dining car. Soon after the train left the station a steward came along and made up the four bunks. I drew the short straw and ended up in one of the two top ones. Soon the luscious black Cape grapes began to purge me of all I had eaten for the past fortnight. For most of the three-day journey I lay prostrate on my upper bunk, except for frequent trips to the foul smelling lavatory at the end of the corridor. I never did taste the delicious food that was served in the dining car. By the time the train reached Gaberone, in what was then Bechunaland, I had recovered sufficiently to clean myself up and take an interest in the passing countryside, mostly dry arid desert and the odd run down station. The very thought of food made me feel ill again.

BULAWAYO

At about eight o'clock the following morning we reached Bulawayo. The sun was hot and powerful at that time of the morning and the clean looking station was a far cry from the murky environment of Waterloo. Billy and I were met by a charming couple, Alec Paul and his wife, who welcomed us to Southern Rhodesia and to Bulawayo. We were driven in Paul's large American car to the Sussex Hotel situated in Fort Street not far from the station. We were shown to a room, which Billy and I were to share it was called a hotel but really it was more like a second class boarding house. The rooms were clean but had seen better times. The food was basic, but we didn't starve. The English couple who ran the hotel were running the business on a shoestring. There were no frills. Most of the residents were recent arrivals from the United Kingdom and among them there were one or two young families. Billy and I soon met up with several young men who had also come out from Britain to join the Post Office. We got to know two Scots chaps - Arthur Watson and Brian McPherson. Arthur had a Morris Minor convertible and took us to the cinema on a couple of occasions, or as it was known "the bioscope"

Bulawayo Post Office

My first impression of the Post Office was one of amazement. The building I had left behind in Hemel Hempstead was modern and immaculately maintained. The one in Bulawayo had not been up-dated, by the look of it since before the First World War and had neither been dusted nor swept properly for years. The local staff viewed us with suspicion and made it very obvious that we were not welcome. We were given the lowliest of tasks in the sorting office. To work on the counter was considered to be only for the senior members of staff, that is Rhodesians. I began to wonder if I had done the right thing in coming all this way, I did

enjoy the climate, if nothing else. I had no form of transport other than walking and it was a long way to walk from the hotel to Main Street in the centre of town where the office was situated. The solution was to buy a bike. Having the money I bought a new one for cash from Alec Stuart the local cycle dealer, Billy of course also needed one as well, but had no funds of his own. The end of the month when we were to receive our first pay was several weeks away. No one seemed to worry whether we new arrivals had any money or not. The inevitable happened and I bought Billy a secondhand bike. I never did get the money back.

Gradually I got into the swing of things and got to know several more of the staff that had come out from Britain. With pay now coming in on a regular basis I opened a bank account at the local branch of Barclays. I made inquiries about how I could make arrangements for Jean to join me later in the year. I was advised that I would have to lodge two hundred pounds with the Bank, earmarked for the Department of Immigration before Jean could be given permission to enter the country and before her passage could be booked. There was a proviso that we get married within a fortnight of her arrival. How soon could I get that amount of money together? First of all though I really had to get somewhere better to stay. The Sussex Hotel was not the sort of place in which I wanted to live for very long. What finally made my mind up to move was the death of the sister of the owner. She was in her early twenties and had found herself pregnant; I suspect it was by one of the Post Office fellows staying at the hotel. It was rumored that she had attempted an abortion. Besides this there was I am sure a culture of bed swapping among the couples and others at the hotel.

I had become friendly with Stewart Cameron, a Scots fellow of a similar age to myself. He had served in the army in the Royal Signals in Germany and enjoyed much the same things as I did. We started going out in the evenings together for drinks at the Grand Hotel and to the bioscope. We both enjoyed classical music. He was living at a boarding house at the other end of town run my Mrs Reid. Happily for me she had a vacancy, and I duly moved in. Stewart and I decided not to share a room. The army had taught us a thing or two. So I left the Sussex Hotel and took up residence at 11 Lobengula Street, which was to be my home for the next 10 months or so. I left Billy Haliday behind at the Hotel. He had found friends among people from Northern Ireland. I saw little of him after that. As far as I can recollect he got married some years later and went to run

a small Post Office in the coal mining area of Wankie. He ended up in prison having been caught embezzling Post Office funds.

Life at No 11 Lobengula Street, with eight other boarders, was much better than the Sussex. The food was reasonable, the beds clean, washing was done for us and on the whole we were well looked after. Stewart and I went out quite a bit and became firm friends. There was a little bit of culture in the town. I remember going to hear Eileen Joyce the pianist perform at a local theatre and also Claudio Arrau. We listened to my collection of classical records played on my portable wind-up gramophone. I didn't have a great deal of money to spare as I was saving hard to get together the two hundred pounds required for Jean to come out. Stewart had a car and on one of the longer public holidays, Rhodes and Founders I think it was called, we were invited out to spend the weekend at a ranch near Shangani. This was my first experience of the bush. At Easter two other fellows and I had cycled out to the Matopos Hills and had lunch at the Matopos Hotel. I suffered afterwards from a touch of sunstroke, not thinking to wear a hat on the ride. Stewart and I worked in different sections of the Post Office so we didn't see each other during the day and if we were on different shifts probably only at weekends. Jean and I corresponded a great deal during these months making plans as to what we would do when she eventually arrived

Work wise for the first few months it was a case of the locals and we Brits. Several of the Rhodesians had been in the army during the war mostly in the Western Desert some had been prisoners of war and had a hard time. They all kept themselves very much to themselves and we were never invited out to visit at their homes. Our presence was resented and we were often given the jobs that no one else wanted. A break for me came one morning when I was asked to go to the counter and take over from someone who was not ' well', in fact he was so drunk (at 9 o'clock in the morning) that he couldn't stand up. There was no explanation as to what the counter position was for. I insisted however on balancing and ensuring that everything was accounted for before I opened up. The person in charge was not very pleased with me. After a little while I became used to the procedures. It was good to be back dealing with the public after several months slaving in the sorting office. I must have made my mark, as I very rarely worked in the sorting office again. From then onwards I was gradually accepted. When I look back I realize that the working conditions, compared to those in Britain, were appalling. The

counter positions were filthy and the woodwork falling to pieces. To close the position you had to draw a green curtain that hung by rings from a brass rail. The material was in shreds and full of dust. The curtains must have been there since before the First World War, possibly since the building was constructed. What I did not realize at the time of course was that funds were very tight and there was no money available for refurbishment. Being on the counters meant of course that I was no longer subject to working shifts with their early mornings. So the months passed amiably.

My bank balance began to increase and my goal of two hundred pounds seemed to be in sight. I had now come to know several of my English compatriots quite well among them Len Anderson who appeared to have a lot more money to spare than I did. He spent most of his money on clothes. Transport was for most of us was still confined to bicycles, with Stewart being the only exception. I couldn't drive anyhow and getting Jean out to Rhodesia was my priority. Life at 11 Lobengula Street was like one big family. The Reids had three children. William was the elder and there were two daughters whose names I can't remember. Mr Reid was a plumber and ran a small business. Peter and Vida often had their minor disagreements but they were as far as we could make out never very serious. Everything was out in the open. I can never recollect there being any upsets or quarrels among us lodgers. One evening after dinner Stewart and I went for a walk, it being a very warm evening and we needed a breath of fresh air. I gathered he was anxious to tell me something. It appeared that that morning, Mrs Reid had gone to take the children to school. Stewart was not on duty until later that morning. He was hunting for a clean shirt and wandered into the Reid's bedroom where the clean laundry was often kept folded on the bed only to find Peter Reid, naked on the bed enjoying himself with one of the African servant girls, Stewart apologized for barging in and beat a hasty retreat. Not a word was said. Later Stewart had a word with Peter who was not at all worried about the interruption. Was this a regular occurrence we wondered? We suspected it was!

Life continued pleasantly at 11 Lobengula Street and I gradually became used to work at the Post office. Europeans performed all the work, except for the menial tasks. All sorting office duties were done by men with the exception of the sorting of mail into the private boxes, which was done by married women who were classed as temporary staff. Most of these

women were wives of recent immigrants, mainly artisan types. I got to know several of them. One of them Ivy Blaauw became a great friend of ours. She hailed from Norwich and her husband worked on the railways. Whites staffed all the counters. The main counter hall was set aside for white customers only and the African customers were herded into a small section away from the main entrance. For some reason people like me who had recently come from Britain now manned these counters. I felt ashamed at their behaviour towards the Africans who were mostly messengers from local firms. They were treated with no courtesy whatsoever and were shouted at and bullied. This was the accepted way of dealing with them. I found it very distressing

The money I had set aside in the bank to secure Jean's entry into the country (two hundred pounds) was beginning to grow and I calculated that by the beginning of September I would have the full amount. We could then start and plan what we had to do. Jean could do very little in England except secure her passage and tie the loose ends. Here in Bulawayo there would be a wedding to arrange and a honeymoon to think about. Life in the meantime continued steadily. The war hadn't appeared to have effected Rhodesia very much and it remained I expect much as it did before September 1939. The daily pace was relaxed and quiet. The climate was excellent there were no shortages and there was little stress. At work the local staff gradually accepted us. There was little they could do about it. Still no one invited us into their homes and they didn't mix with us socially. For us the locals were very much a closed society. I suppose the exception was the Reids whose home at 11 Lobengula Street was our home as well. For single chaps it was a good place to live.

At last the day arrived and I had the two hundred pounds safely in the bank. I put in my application for permission for Jean to enter Southern Rhodesia and for formalities to begin in the UK in order that she could obtain a passage. All the information was done by post (airmail). This was our only means of communication, using the telephone was out of the question in those days. Jean didn't have a telephone at home in Stowmarket, anyhow. All was finally arranged and Jean sailed from Southampton early in October of 1949. It would be almost three weeks before I could welcome her to Bulawayo. One of the stipulations of her entry to Southern Rhodesia was that we were to be married within two weeks of her arrival. There was no hanging about or moving in with me at Lobengula Street.

Somewhere had to found for her to live until we were married. Stewart had met and become friendly with a family from Britain; they had a building business and had a very nice house about half a mile from the Reids. They were pleased to accommodate her. Mr Insley agreed to give Jean away at the wedding and their teenage daughter, also Jean, would be bridesmaid. I found time to get to the church of St John the Baptist (later to become the cathedral) to arrange for the ceremony. In the meantime I had been granted two weeks leave, even though I had only been in the job less than a year. I organized the honeymoon, two weeks at the Leopard Rock hotel in the Vumba Mountains not far from Umtali. I thought it might be cool away from the summer heat. I had no idea about the hotel or where it was situated, but everyone seemed to think that it was a lovely place to go visit. To get there we would have to spend almost twenty-four hours on a train travelling from Bulawayo via Salisbury. . . There was one problem - the only train to Umtali on Saturdays left at 10. 00am. The church agreed for us to have the service at 8. 00am, the earliest time it could be. We were to be honoured as the Archdeacon of Matabeleland was to marry us. Mrs. Reid very generously offered to hold a small reception at her house for which we were very thankful.

There were flowers to be ordered. The only florist in town was also part of the local funeral parlour. Jean had given me an idea of what flowers she would like and their colour. All that was left was for me to appoint the best man. Stewart was my choice of course, but at the last minute he was posted away from Bulawayo to the Post Office in Wankie. Len Anderson another boarder at Lobengula Street agreed to step in. All was in place; all I wanted was the bride.

At last a telegram arrived from Jean; she had arrived at Cape Town. The wait was almost over. She was to spend a night there before catching the train to Bulwayo. A journey which would take her three days and three nights.

MONDAY the 24th OCTOBER 1949

I was up just after six o'clock on the morning of the 24th October 1949. The air was hot and dry even at that early hour of the morning. The month of October was considered to be the hottest month of the year, the harbinger of the rainy season. It was know locally as "Suicide Month". Mrs Reid had kindly agreed to take me in her car to meet the train: I only had a bike!

We left the house at about half past seven. The dusty atmosphere of the town already hung heavily in the heat as we made our way to the station through the wide streets lined with mauve jacaranda trees whose shadows formed cool uneven patches on the pavements. The town was beginning to come alive as people made their way to work. The station appeared unexpectedly quiet even though there were a good number of cars parked outside. Everyone had sought the cool interior of the booking hall and whatever shade could be found. This scene was in marked contrast to that damp January morning nine months ago when we had said our good-byes on the platform at London Waterloo. I had wondered then whether or not our plans, so optimistically drawn up, would materialize.

My excitement had been building up since I had heard from Jean that she had booked her passage on the Cape Town Castle. Now at last I was standing on the platform at Bulawayo eagerly awaiting the arrival of the boat train from the Cape. I looked expectantly down the track into the glaring sunlight. At long last the powerful locomotive steamed into sight pulling its train of old fashioned wooden coaches and drew majestically alongside the platform. With a squealing of brakes and a final explosion of steam the train drew to a halt. At eight o'clock in the morning it was right on time despite its three and a half day journey up country from Cape Town.

Suddenly a small crowd emerged from the shade of the booking hall into the glare of the platform. Heads began to appear from the carriage windows as the passengers lent out with shouts of recognition as friends and relatives greeted one another. The commotion increased as luggage and small children were passed to those alongside. People began to climb down from the small verandahs at the ends of the carriages. Reluctant porters were shouted for to gather up cases piled on the platform and to take them out to the awaiting cars. The crowd began to thin as the carriages emptied. I could see no sign of my long awaited Jean – where was she? There was no mistake about her arrival in Cape Town as she had telegraphed me as soon as the ship had docked. My heart missed a beat. What on earth was I to do; the wedding was arranged for Saturday, just five days away? In desperation I began to walk the length of the now almost empty train peering anxiously into each compartment. Suddenly I heard my name being called "Pat I'm here, I'm here". It was a familiar voice. I looked again and again but could see no one that I recognized. A lovely young girl in a cool green and white silk frock (the New Look had

arrived) complete with white gloves and a smart hat with a veil stepped down from the train. Jean had arrived. Thank goodness, I could think straight again. After a long greeting to span those nine months apart she jokingly said to me "Did you really expect me to arrive in the same skirt and blouse that I used to wear at the office?" Those long months of anticipation and waiting were over. Jean had finally arrived and I didn't even recognize her. So far our plans had succeeded.

I spent the few days before the wedding at work. Jean was staying with the Innsleys and I managed to see her in the evenings. There was little time for us to be together. Mrs. Reid very kindly took Jean into town to buy a hat and shoes and to make final arrangements for the flowers. Jean was rather suprised to find that the florist who was supplying the bouquet and other flowers was part of the local funeral undertakers business. Somehow or other we did manage to visit the jewelers to buy the wedding ring. And Jean did manage to get to know her bridesmaid.

A LETTER FROM DAD

A day or so before the wedding I received a letter from my father. He very rarely wrote to me but he obviously felt the need to do so because he wouldn't be there to see his eldest son getting married.

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My Dear Pat

Jean's arrival has now materialised and I can imagine how on Top of the world you feel. Now at last all you have been looking forward to has come at last and the future is all before you. What it will give you no one knows but I feel sure that you will make the best of it. You are taking a wife and in my opinion a good one and I hope you will take care of her, of course I know you will say: of course I will, but marriage is not just easy. It is full of the most beautiful times, with quite a few hard times thrown in, and it is the hard times that try very hard to blank out the rest. That is where a good memory and a lasting appreciation holds one in good stead. Your wife old chap is going to occupy the place your mother has had since you arrived. I am not inferring that you will forget your mother not a bit of it. But you have no doubt felt a mother's love and it has been the only proved one. You are now going to prove that you have another

love which will grow on you to the exclusion of all others, and that should include yourself. I do not suggest you are selfish but that is just one thing that must not creep into your life of the future, to quote an old saying – you must always give and take, but I not so sure that that is quite correct. My emphasis should be on the give, as it is so easy to take. I am not referring to things material altogether, as you will find.

Well Pat I did not start to write a sermon but as you know I have great regard for the good things in life and I have found my married life to be the best part. I hope that you will be blest with the same happiness and affection. Mother and I will be with you on your wedding day, you will have our blessing and may God bless you both and give you all happiness with prosperity. Kiss Jean for me give her my very best wishes and although I have not written to her personally this time perhaps you might let her read my letter.

My love to you both

Pop

THE WEDDING DAY SATURDAY 29 OCTOBER 1949

The day for me started early. I had to be at the Church of St John the Baptist in the centre of town by a quarter to eight. The morning was not too hot and I wore my best Austin Reed suit with its waistcoat. Rather warm for that time of year, but it was the smartest outfit that I had. The Reid's had two cars and my best man (Len Anderson) and I were to be driven to the church in one of them. We prepared to start off just after half past seven. The car would not start for some reason or other, despite the efforts of Peter Reid. It was approaching quarter to eight and the car still didn't show any sign of life. At last after another try we were on our way and reached the Church just on eight o'clock and hurried in by a side door. I had hardly time to sit down before the bride arrived. As the service was at eight o'clock in the morning there were quite a number of the Post Office staff there. The Archdeacon of Matabeleland the Venerable Aldington-Hunt conducted the service. I don't think he enjoyed being up that early on a Saturday morning. The bride wore a pink cloque suit and a white hat trimmed with pink rosebuds. She carried a bouquet of pink roses.

Wedding Day 1949

After the service and the usual wedding photographs had been taken we proceeded to 11 Lobengula Street for a short reception. I am not sure of how many of us there were possibly about 15 or so. It must have been just after nine when we sat down. It was just a case of a few snacks, the cutting of a small cake that Mrs Reid had made for us and the reading of quite a lot of telegrams mainly from overseas. I believe there were one or two short speeches. I can't remember making one myself. Poor Jean, I was the only one at the reception and at the church that she knew. There were a few tears when the best man Len Anderson read out the cables from Home. In no time at all it was time to leave for the railway station. The bride on this occasion did not change into a going away outfit. I did however need to divest myself of my heavy weight suit. And change into a lightweight one. Off we all drove to the station with plenty of time to catch the train to Umtali. It only ran three times a week so it would not have done to miss this one. There was lots of chitchat on the platform as we waited to board. Len Anderson reminded me to check and see if I had the tickets and the vouchers for the hotel. A quick check of my pockets and there was a real problem – I had left them in my other suit. There was about ten minutes before the train left. I just had time to get to Lobengula Street and back. Someone spoke to the guard and he said he wouldn't go without us. Fortunately 11 Lobegula Street wasn't too far away. I arrived back and the train was still there and waiting. Another adventure for Jean began another long journey into what was for her the unknown.

Well we had made it. So far we had accomplished what we planned to do almost a year previously. Our compartment was First Class with two berths known as a coupe. There was plenty of room for us both and so we settled down to get to know each other after nine months of separation. Within half an hour or so the handle of the compartment door rattled

and we were asked if we wanted morning coffee. Yes we were ready for something to drink. So why not. Few minutes later a brief knock and our tray of coffee and biscuits was brought in. The staff in those days was all white and the lady who brought our tray was very obviously aware that we had just got married. She couldn't have missed seeing the party on the platform. We were in for a great deal of attention on our journey.

We arrived in Salisbury in the early evening and our carriage was attached to the Umtali train. The conductor warned us not to leave the carriage in case we were left behind. Soon after we left Salisbury dinner was served in the dining car. There were big grins from the staff. After a good meal we returned to our compartment and to our own devices. It was not the most comfortable of places to spend the first night of our married life. The train arrived at Umtali station early the following morning, at about six o'clock. There was a slight problem, however, as the train did not draw up at the platform and we had to climb down from the train onto the track and make our way, carrying our cases across the railway lines to the platform. For me it wasn't too bad but for Jean in high heels and wearing white gloves it was rather tricky.

Leopard Rock Hotel

On booking the hotel I had not realised that the train arrived so early in the morning and had been advised that we could catch the daily bus from the town centre to the Leopards Rock Hotel up in the Vumba Mountains. The bus though didn't leave until later in the morning. So instead we took a taxi. I had no idea how far we had to travel or anything about the place we were going to. The taxi took us out of town and began to take the dusty road up into the mountains. The early morning mist hung over the lush vegetation and the sun began to filter through the trees lining the road which twisted and turned as we climbed higher and higher. We finally left the road and made our way up a long drive and before us lay

the hotel set against a backdrop of Blue Mountains and forest. Neither of us had seen anything like this before. As the taxi drew up at the entrance African drums began to sound. We really were in the heart of Africa. At least that is what we thought!

We had arrived 12 hours earlier than I had informed the hotel. All was forgiven and we were duly booked in and given breakfast. We had a lovely room at the front of the hotel overlooking the spacious grounds with mountains in the background. The air up here was so different from that in Bulawayo, which was, dry dusty and hot. Here in the Vumba the air was fresh and pure with the smell of pine and eucalyptus from the surrounding forests. I was sure we were going to enjoy ourselves for the next two weeks. It was something entirely new for both of us as neither Jean nor I had stayed in a hotel before. Here we were after nine months apart attempting to get to know one another again. This time we were married which made a great deal of difference. There was much to find out about each other. We weren't altogether successful, but we did make progress during those two weeks. There was not a great deal to occupy us. We went for walks, played table tennis, talked to other guests and generally lazed around and did what couples on honeymoon usually do. It was many years before we were to return to this lovely place. It was an adventure for both of us. We returned to Bulawayo to begin our life together.

Mrs Reid at 11 Lobengula Street had allotted us a bedroom at the rear of the house that looked out onto the garden. Jean had managed to get a job as a telegraphist (teleprinter operator) at the Post Office, which helped our finances and gave her the opportunity to get to know other people. Life was quite pleasant and we held a small party to thank those who had helped us at the wedding. We continued to see the Insleys from time to time. We were quite happy lodging at the Reid's but naturally, like any newly wed couple would have preferred a place of our own, A friend of the Insleys, I think he was also involved in the building trade, wanted to leave the country. His wife had already returned to England. He was renting a small house on a new development that the municipality had built to help alleviate the housing shortage. This new suburb of Bulawayo was called Queens Park. Most of the people who lived there were new immigrants to the country. The person in question was willing to let us take over his house on the understanding that we bought most of the furniture. We still had some of the money left, which I had put down for surety on

Jean and we decided to use this and pay the balance back monthly over a short period. We agreed that the person we were buying the furniture from could stay on in the house until he left. We were sure that we could meet these payments as Jean was working. We left 11 Lobengula Street and moved into the house in Queen's Park in January 1950. Queens Park was some 5 miles from town and was served by a bus route and we both had bicycles. The road consisted of two strips of concrete, which we found could be a little tricky when riding a bike.

Housing for the increasing number of immigrants arriving in Rhodesia was urgently required. To help satisfy this need a particular mode of construction was used knows as a pise -de- terre. Using this technique houses were quick and easy to erect. Local materials, which were freely available, were used and were similar to those utilised for the building of African huts. The roofs like the African huts were thatched. There were no ceilings in the original ones built but as the method became more widely used ceilings were incorporated. Electricity was supplied and basic bathrooms and kitchens installed. Our house did have a ceiling and was very comfortable and cool. By the time the project was completed there were some two hundred houses in Queens Park together with a doctors' surgery and a new brick built Post Office. We now had a house of our own. And a lodger as well!

Soon after we had settled in to our new abode Jean began to feel unwell and was being sick a great deal. Yes she was pregnant – we were going to have a baby! Work for her was out of the question; there was no way she could cycle in 5 miles to work and back so she had to resign. We had been relying on her wages to help pay the rent and to pay off the remainder of the money we owed on the household effects. Somehow we managed. Jean was left at home all day on her own with no friends, not feeling well and with no telephone. My days were long as we needed the money and overtime was freely available. The lodger eventually left to return to his wife in England and we were left on our own. The servant who worked for him called Phineas stayed on with us. We must have paid him a pittance but for all that he was loyal and hard working. At least Jean didn't have to do the housework. Servants were new to Jean, though I had had experience of their services whilst I was in India.

We carried on for several months paying the rent to the City Hall. The house was still in the name of the tenant we had taken it over from; the utility bills on the other hand were in my name. We also paid these to

the City Hall. We were of course illegal tenants and in due course the municipal authorities put two and two together and I was summoned to explain myself. The outcome - we were to be evicted. I had no option now but to lay myself at the mercy of housing officer and plead for accommodation using the fact that I had a wife who was several months pregnant. After much negotiation we were reluctantly given a so-called flat, blocks of which had recently been erected in the Queens Park area. The flat consisted of two rooms, a living room and a bedroom, both 12 feet x 12 feet and a lean to kitchen at the rear. Bathroom and lavatory facilities were communal and were shared by three flats. The construction of the single storey complex (six flats in L shape, three on each side) was of asbestos sheeting for the exterior walls corrugated asbestos sheeting for the roof with plasterboard for the interior walls. There was a wide verandah, or stoep, at the front, which kept the places cool. We were lucky to have this. The rent was a bit cheaper than the house, which did help us. The problem was how were we going to fit a lounge suite (three chairs and a settee) a dining room suite (a table, six chairs and a sideboard) and a bedroom suite (a double bed, two wardrobes and a dressing table) into two small rooms. As far as the moving went Vida and Peter Reid came to the rescue. He had a large pick up truck, which he used for his work as a plumber. With help from friends we moved out of the house and into our so called flat. By a feat of ingenuity it was all fitted in with very little space to spare. We were in our own place at last.

All this must have taken place in about June or July of 1950. Jean was feeling quite a bit better now and was fully mobile. One of the larger things that we purchased at this time was our first refrigerator, which was a necessity. Another item that we bought was a hand sewing machine. It was much cheaper for Jean to make her own clothes rather than buy them and she enjoyed the challenge and she soon set about making her maternity skirts and smocks. The servant, Phineas, who we had employed at the house, came with us. There was not a great deal for him to do. With all the furniture we had there was little floor space to keep clean. Washing up and ironing were his main pursuits as well as cleaning my shoes. He was a gem really even though he spoke little English and we spoke none of the local Ndebele or the lingua franca – "Kitchen Kaffir" which a lot of the Rhodesians used. I never did get the hang of it.

Jean's days must have been lonely as I often had to be on duty in the Sorting Office by 6. 30am and it was often after 6. 00pm before I arrived home. I

cycled the five miles into town and back; sometimes in the dark during the winter. There was a bus service from Queens Park to the centre of town, which ran during the week and on Saturdays. Jean would often come in to town and meet me at lunch- time in the War Memorial gardens next to the Post Office where we would eat our sandwiches. Here sometimes we met a retired clergyman Canon Ellis. He lived with his daughter and her husband at Queensdale a small village just beyond where we lived. From all accounts they drank a great deal. The poor old man was painfully thin and showed signs of neglect. His clothes were shabby and his shoes down at heel but he always wore his clerical collar with pride, dirty as it was. We felt sorry for him. We never, however, managed to learn anything about his background. Jean would then spend the afternoon shopping and catch the bus back. Sometimes after our lunchtime sandwiches if the money ran to it, we would go to a small cafe opposite the Post Office for a cup of coffee before I returned to work. It was called Dalton's and was run by two very pleasant ladies, one tall and very thin and the other short and plump. They were both always well dressed and both very friendly. The cafe was well patronised, the food plain and very simple.

The buses we used from Queens Park were divided into two parts. At the rear, was the African section with wooden seats. A door leads through to the front, where the seats were upholstered. This section was for Europeans only. The drivers were all white, as were the conductors. I remember later on when they were replaced by Africans there were threats from some whites to boycott the service; they never did though.

Saturday nights in Bulawayo were busy with the cinemas (bioscopes) full. The bars and the hotels also did a roaring trade. Quite a few people in Queens Park, including us, didn't have cars and so relied on the bus on Saturday evenings to get into town. As far as I can recollect there were two cinemas, the Palace and the 20th Century. There was just one screening at 8 o'clock. Everyone dressed up, especially the ladies who often wore long frocks or as they were called cocktail dresses displaying all their jewellery. Saturday evening at the pictures was a very social occasion with some people going out to dinner before hand. For those travelling by bus from Queens Park it was very important to look the part. Jean and I would often laugh to ourselves as we boarded the bus just after seven on a Saturday evening. The women all dressed up to the nines with their fur capes and crystal beads and earrings, the men in their suits. After the end of the performance about ten-thirty, we would make our way to the bus

station at the rear of the City Hall. If there was time we would stop and have coffee at one of the pie carts that were operating in the street nearby. The hotels and cinemas were strictly whites only and there were very few if any Africans to be seen. One Saturday evening Jean and I went in to see the film Henry V. It was a longer than usual film and the last bus had left. We had a cup of coffee at the pie cart to fortify ourselves for the very long walk home to Queens Park!

By now we had settled down in our very small flat. Ours was on an end next to the communal bathroom. Adjoining us on the other side were our neighbours, Thelma and Harley Apsey. They were much older than Jean and I probably the same age as our parents. We gradually got to know them. It appeared that Harley had worked as an assayer on a gold mine and through ill health had retired and now looked after the flat. Thelma worked in town in some kind of an accounting job. They were both very well spoken and appeared well educated. She was from Durban originally and he from Cape Town where he had been to Bishop's the local Public School. They had no children and had spent most of their working lives in the bush on various gold mines where accommodation was provided. Thelma told us they had never unpacked their wedding presents, which were piled up in boxes in their living room just leaving room for two easy chairs. To us this seemed to be very strange existence. We had so much furniture and our wedding gifts all on display. Still they were very pleasant people and Harley offered to take Jean to the hospital when the baby was due. He had an old Ford pick-up whilst we had just two bikes! Harley and Thelma continued to be good friends for many years after we moved away from Queens Park.

As the year 1950 moved on Jean walked to the local doctors' surgery for maternity check-ups and was able to get into Bulawayo by bus. Our friend Stewart Cameron was now back in town from his stint of duty at the Post Office in Wankie. He had a car, a large Chevrolet coupe, and took us out on the odd occasion. At this time there was a small influx of male recruits from the UK, all of them young single lads. Our little flat became a place for them to go on Sundays. Late in the afternoon they would begin to arrive and park their bikes on our veranda. Jean would serve a Sunday tea, sandwiches, cake and tinned fruit. There would be no alcohol, cheap as it was we couldn't afford it for so many people. On our own though we did enjoy a glass of beer or two. Sometimes it was hard work cycling to and from work, especially in the dark and in the summer months when

it rained hard. Often I had to be on duty at 6am and didn't get home until late. It must have been a lonely time for Jean, though she didn't complain. We had gradually become used to the Rhodesian way of life. Of course there was no television though we did have limited wireless programmes which broadcast at certain hours during the day and from six o'clock in the evening until ten o'clock. We had bought a second hand set from Mrs Brown who lodged with the Reids in Lobengula Street. The baby was due towards the end of October. I must admit I didn't have any idea what to expect. My sister Anne had been born when I was 15 in 1939 though I didn't take a great deal of interest. I had I suppose some experience of a new baby in the household not that I was involved very much.

Early on the morning of the 27th October 1950 the call came from Jean that it was time to get to the Lady Rodwell the maternity hospital in the suburb of Kumalo. The baby was on its way. Harvey Apsey from next door was true to his word and whisked us up to the hospital in his rattling old pick-up. Husbands were strictly forbidden to stay so we went back home to Queens Park where I got ready for work. I was on duty on the counters that morning so I had plenty of time to get in to the Post Office. I can't say that I remember being very worried about what was happening and just got on with serving my customers. Towards lunchtime I decided that it would be a good idea if I rang the Lady Rodwell hospital to see how things were progressing. It was not as easy as it seems as first. Before I rang I had to go to see the person in charge of the counters to obtain his permission to use the telephone. When I explained what the call was about I was allowed to make it but strongly reminded that the call must be paid for. The hospital said that Jean had had a little girl and that I should come up to see my wife as soon as possible. On my arrival one of the nurses thought that I was rather young to be a father and showed me in to see Jean and the new baby. I don't remember being unduly concerned at the time or question why the hospital asked me to go so soon. It wasn't until much later that I learned that Jean had had rather a tough time at the delivery. How naive I must have been. I covered many miles on my bicycle during the next week travelling to and from the hospital at visiting times. Hospital visiting was new to me and I didn't care for it very much. Looking back on all of this it must have been a very traumatic time for Jean away from family and in what was still a different way of life.

After several days in the care of the maternity home Jean and baby Jennifer Anne were taken by Harvey Apsey in his old pick-up truck back home to

our little flat in Queens Park. During the day we managed to squeeze a second hand cot, which we had purchased a few weeks previously, into our bedroom. At night it, with our little girl, was returned to the living room. Jean on a visit sometime afterwards to the doctor who informed that she needed and operation for an ovarian cyst. This was arranged and again the Reids stepped in to help. Jennifer went to 11 Lobengula Street to be looked after. Jean recovered, we settled down, and life continued. During the months that followed we acquired our first washing machine, very necessary because of all of the nappies. Among the young men who used to visit us at weekends was Ian Macintosh. He had recently obtained a girl friend Rosemary Duff the daughter of a local clergyman. It was difficult for them to be together and so they used to visit us in the evenings when we sat around the dining table and often played Monopoly. Jean got to know some of our neighbours among them Doris and Peter Howes who remained friends for the remainder of the time we were in Bulawayo.

In 1951 a Post Office was built in Queens Park not too far from where we lived. As business grew an assistant to the Postmaster was required. I was approached and asked if Jean would like the job as we lived nearby. She decided to return to work and a neighbour agreed to look after Jennifer. We were not too well off and the extra money came in handy.

Life in the flat was very cramped and we felt it was time to look for something larger; a house seemed out of the question. Even with our combined wages we couldn't afford to rent and besides that affordable housing was scarce. Towards the end of 1951 the town council acquired some land in the suburb of North End about half way between Queens Park and the town. A development of some 100 houses was built and made available for sale to the public. We were very interested in buying one but for us to find the finance was out of the question. Jean took time off from work to see if she could find some help, but mortgages were unobtainable for people in our position. At the beginning of 1952 I finished my three-year contract with the Southern Rhodesian Government and we decided to stay rather than go back to England We had no money for our fares back to the UK anyhow. The Postmaster at Queens Park, Howard Phillips, was the brother in law of the Postmaster of Bulawayo, John Donkin. Our predicament must have been discussed between them because my transfer to the permanent staff was rushed through. As a consequence I then became eligible for a 100% loan from the Government Land Bank which allowed us to purchase 3 Hunt Avenue North End for the sum of

£3000 with monthly repayments of £16 per month. The house was huge compared to our flat. Three double bedrooms, a large lounge, a dining room a decent sized kitchen with cupboards and shelving and of course our own bathroom. Outside two large stoeps and accommodation in the back garden in the form of a "kia" for our servant Phineas who was still with us. At last our furniture came into its own and there was little that we had to buy. We were able to furnish the lounge, the dining room and the main bedroom, the other two bedrooms would have to wait.

Hunt Avenue, North End Bulawayo

Again the Reids came to the rescue and with the help of friends and Peter Reid's truck our furniture was moved into 3 Hunt Avenue which was to remain our home until October 1966. This was bliss after our minuscule flat. The house had stood empty for several months after its completion and unbeknown to us our bedroom was infested with bed bugs. With the help of a friendly chemist we soon had the place fumigated. It is a wonder that I didn't gas myself in the process. There was, however, for the first month or so, one small problem. We were not connected to the sewage system. Water from the bathroom and kitchen flowed into a temporary soak away in the ground at the back of the house. In the back garden stood side by side two portable lavatories made from corrugated iron sheeting. One for us and the other for our servant. They consisted of a wooden seat over a pail, which was emptied at night, the sewage connection wasn't too long in coming thank goodness. And so our life at 3 Hunt Avenue, Northend Bulawayo began.

Our house (bungalow) stood on a third of an acre, which seemed to us an enormous amount of ground. There was no fencing of any kind and so first of all we had to find the wherewithal to fence it. Having done this then came the task of making a garden. Neither of us had any idea whatsoever of how to begin. With the help of our faithful servant Phineas things gradually began to take shape. The results were not very spectacular but

the place slowly became less like a part of the veldt. In front of the house stood a huge tree. What kind it was I have no idea. It must have been centuries old and had a large wild fig entwined amongst its branches. It must have been too difficult for the developers to remove. We didn't like it at first as it was right in front of the lounge but we became used to it over the years; the only problem was that the leaves blocked the gutters at the front of the house and they often needed to be cleaned out. I hated the tropical storms that we had during the summer months with heavy rain and spectacular lightning. I was always afraid that lighting would strike the tree resulting in it falling on the house. It never did!

Journeys to and from work were much easier now especially in the winter months with decent roads all the way as well as street lighting. Life altogether was much pleasanter; we had so much more space and privacy. We still lacked transport however, but that didn't worry us too much, as there was a reasonable bus service, which ran nearby and took us into town. We couldn't afford to buy a car and anyhow neither of us was able to drive. My pay wasn't all that we had expected it to be but we didn't go hungry. Jean made all her own clothes and those for baby Jennifer, as well, which certainly saved us money.

Gradually we got the garden round, at least Phineas did. I think that he was so pleased to have his own accommodation, a place to call his own. Looking back I wonder how we expected someone to live in such a place. The small "cottage ", which was known as the Kia, was at the back of the house not far from the kitchen. It consisted of one small room with a window, which was used as a bedroom, and a lavatory combined with a cold water shower. If any hot water was needed it came from our kitchen in a bucket. Phineas cooked for himself in the tiny facilities that were provided as a kitchen, which was situated between the living room and the shower. It was partly in the open and consisted of a small concrete shelf built out from the wall, on which he had a Primus stove, which we had provided. We also supplied his food - meat, mealie-meal (maize) and cooking oil, as well as paraffin for the stove. We gave him a bed and a mattress. We also provided him with working clothes – two pairs of khaki trousers and two khaki shirts and of course his monthly wages - £2 per month. Phineas spoke very little English during all the years he was with us and we didn't take the trouble to learn any of his language (Ndbele). Yet we very rarely misunderstood one another. I don't think I ever heard him complain and he always seemed very content with his lot.

Jean continued to work at Queens Park Post Office with Jennifer being looked after by a friend and as far as I can recollect life was pleasant. Work for me was mostly on the counters with periods in the sorting office. We "Immigrants", as we were known, gradually became accepted and were included in the children's Christmas Party. Our circle of friends grew and mostly came from the people at work. Our ties with Home were by means of letters, which were looked forward to each week. We sent photographs to Mum and Dad of their first grandchild. Nothing was said in their letters but they must have missed seeing her. At the beginning of 1952 we decided that perhaps next year (1953) we would try and go back to England for a holiday. We hadn't been away since our honeymoon and we needed a change and I had plenty of leave. It would be a long journey with a small child. Three days by train from Bulawayo to Cape Town and then two weeks by Union Castle boat to Southampton. You had to book well ahead and so we decided to go ahead. We could always change our minds if necessary. Spending money was something we didn't need to worry about too much as my monthly salary could be paid to me from Rhodesia House in London so we would have that to rely on.

1952 passed quickly and we counted the weeks to May 1953 when we were due to leave. At the beginning of 1952 King George VI died and Elizabeth became Queen. It was a good job we had booked when we did as passages were at a premium. We would be in England for the coronation. We let our house furnished to a Royal Air Force officer and his wife for the months that we were away. We thought that it was a good thing at the time, other people did it. It would be a little bit of money to come back to we thought. So off we went on our trip back to England. Three days and nights by train to Cape Town and then two weeks by boat to Southampton.

SOUTHERN RHODESIA 1949 – 1966 (Part 2)

BULAWAYO (Cont'd)

After a pleasant trip we arrived at Southampton to be met by my Mum and Dad who were excited to see us and especially thrilled to see their first granddaughter Jennifer Anne. The first thing Father did when he saw her was to pick her up. She was far from pleased and asked rather forcefully to be put down. Here we were back in Hemel Hempstead again after just over four years. There was a round of visiting old colleagues at the Post Office, who didn't seem to have altered a great deal. My parents had bought their first TV set so that we could all watch the Coronation ceremonies. It was a great novelty and much more sophisticated than the Television I had watched at Aunt Phyll's before the War. Before long we visited Stowmarket to see Jean's folks and to catch up with events in that part of the world. We paid a visit to Birmingham to meet the best man at our wedding, Len Anderson who took us to Stratford-upon-Avon. Then to London to meet Harry Crook, whom we had known in Bulawayo, he had returned to England to persuade his girl friend to come out to Rhodesia. We went with them to see the musical South Pacific at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. It was a great show.

We did a good deal of visiting and had a much to talk about. We were very bold and spent a week in Holland with a couple about our own age whom we had met through a Post Office pen-pal club back in 1948. They lived in Arnhem and made us very welcome. They were about our own age and also had a little girl. We had one or two parties with quite a bit to drink.

Then it was back to Bulawayo to resume our life in that lovely city. We had made a bit of money by renting out our house but it wasn't worth the trouble. Getting the outstanding electricity and telephone bills settled proved to be a bit of a problem as the people we rented the house to were not very forthcoming about the money they owed.

On my return to work I was sent to a Post Office that had been opened in what was now called Centenary Park in Selborne Avenue. An exhibition had been set up there, whilst we were away, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Cecil Rhodes the founder of Rhodesia. It had been opened by Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother who was accompanied by Princess Margaret.

The exhibition was in the early stages of closing down and was no longer open to the public. Most of the main attractions though were still operating

including the Opera House where Jean and I saw a performance of La Boheme with a cast from London. The main exhibits, which were still in place were of a high standard and included stands from many African countries, none of which had at that time attained independence.

I worked at the Post Office in Centenary Park until the site finally closed. The Postmaster was a man who, like many Rhodesians drank a great deal. At the end of the last full day of operations he gave a party for the staff at one of the bars on site. I had drunk very little since my Army days but was persuaded, much to my better judgement, on this evening, to take my fill. I cycled home in the dark very much the worse for wear. The welcome I had was one of disgust. Without my dinner I adjourned to the bedroom. The following morning, a Saturday, I was due to help in packing up the counters. Still very much under the weather, on the way in to work, I fell off my bike and in the process tore a new pair of trousers that I was wearing. On arriving at the office it was seen that I was in no fit state to do anything. Myself and my bike, which thankfully was still in one piece, were taken back home in disgrace. That was the last time I was ever to suffer from an excess of alcohol! The subject was never ever mentioned after that incidence.

It was during this time that I first met Bob Palmer who was also working on the Exhibition site. He was a telephone engineer and was working on the Post Office Telephone stand. I found out that he and his family lived just round the corner from us. He and his wife were of a similar age to Jean and I. Bob and I had quite a bit in common. Our friendship grew, especially within the congregation at St Margaret's Church North End.

The same year, 1953, saw the inauguration of the Federation of Rhodesia & Nyasaland. The Post Office became a part of the Federal Civil Service and as employees we were given the option of either staying with the Southern Rhodesian Civil Service or transferring to the Federal Civil Service and to continue working with the Post Office. Along with most of my fellow workers I decided to stay with the work I knew best and to continue my career in the Post Office. The main difference was that when applying for promotion we were able to choose to apply for posts in either Southern or Northern Rhodesia or Nyasaland. We decided that come what may we would remain where we were. There was little immediate effect on our daily lives and work continued without any undue changes. The only noticeable differences were the new sets of postage stamps and

the inevitable switch to multi-racial counters. Those who served on the counters, however, still remained white.

Life at 3 Hunt Avenue continued with Jennifer Anne a lively three-year-old. During this time our friend Stewart Cameron married Jane, a Scots girl from Peterhead. I think she was rather ashamed of being born in this fishing port where her father was a fisherman and her family still lived. She was a bit of a career girl and worked in a lawyer's office. She wasn't all that fond of children, though both she and Stewart spoiled Jennifer. Their wedding reception was held at our house, nothing very special, but we made the best of what we had. Soon after this Jean and I decided that it was time for us to think of an addition to our family. So we set about the joyful and pleasurable task of getting the ball rolling. We didn't have to wait too long before the desired result was obtained. Jane Cameron was not amused and we were dropped from their list of friends very quickly. We saw very little of them after that and gradually lost touch with them altogether. A pity because Stewart had been such a good friend.

On the 5th June 1954 Gillian Mary entered the world at the Mater Dei hospital in Bulawayo. Being winter in that parts of the world it was cold for Jennifer and me as we waited for the bus to take us home after visiting Mummy and the new baby. Gillian was a bundle of happiness from the first moment she came home. Our little family was complete, at least so we thought.

The months passed without any significant worries and the girls continued to grow and get on well with each other. I think it was soon after Gill, as we now called her, was eighteen months to two years old that we decided that that it was time for us to take a short holiday. We had heard much of the delights of Inyanga in the Eastern Highlands and thought that this would be a pleasant place to visit. There was one problem – this area was only accessible by car the one thing that we didn't have. After much searching on Jean's part we found a way of travelling there. It was a little long winded but it was possible. We found a hotel, nothing very posh but one that would suit us. The journey entailed us going by train from Bulawayo to Rusape the nearest station to Inyanga. From there we could take a Railway Bus to a point a mile or so from the hotel where the management would pick us up by Land Rover.

The time came and we set off for our two weeks away. We left Bulawayo in the evening on the overnight train to Salisbury where in the early

morning our coach was shunted on to the train for Umtali. Some hours later we arrived in Rusape where a Railway Bus was waiting to take us up into the Eastern Highlands, which were a thousand feet, or so higher than Bulawayo. The bus was of special design. The front half was for the carrying of passengers and the rear for goods, including small animals. The passenger section was divided into two separate compartments one in the front for European passengers and one behind that for African passengers. Mail was also carried for farms in the area. On the way up we had a break for mid-morning tea at an old farmhouse and finally arrived at a stopping place where the Land Rover from the hotel was waiting for us. After half-hours drive through wooded countryside and pine plantations we arrived at our hotel. Quite a journey with our two small girls and quite a bit of luggage, including a small pushchair: but all went well with no problems. Many years later we would make similar trips by car from Salisbury, which would take us just a few hours. Without a car we were unable to venture far afield but found plenty of walks to enjoy in the surrounding woodland.

The hotel food wasn't bad; it was full board with morning and afternoon tea so we had plenty to eat and had our moneys worth. It was a relaxing time with the girls. Plenty of walks and lots of ball games. Time was spent on recording our activities on our newly acquired Brownie Cine camera. Staying at the hotel, whose name I can't remember, were a young couple from Salisbury who had a little girl. We became friendly with them and they kindly took us out in their car to several beauty spots in the area. There was a small swimming pool in the hotel grounds fed by a spring. The water was freezing cold and according to the films we took the girls didn't like it very much. It was an enjoyable holiday and we returned to Bulawayo refreshed.

Family life continued, Phineas our servant was still with us he now had a girl friend Lizzie who we allowed to stay with him in the "kia" at the rear of 3 Hunt Avenue. She would sometimes look after the girls for us if we wanted to go out in the evenings. She was a large lady and the girls were very fond of her. We were still very friendly with Peter and Doris Howes who continued to live in Queens Park. Peter now had a car, a Ford Anglia, and used to come and collect us and take us to tea at their house on a Sunday afternoon. About this time Jean was offered a job on the counters in the main Post Office and decided to accept it. The money she earned we agreed could be put towards a trip to England, possibly in 1957. Jennifer

was now at school in Sauerstown and both girls were looked after at a nursery run by a Mrs Clough who lived not far from Hunt Avenue. In the September of 1956 Jean became pregnant and so all thoughts of a trip to England were put aside and Jean left work at the Post Office.

With a forthcoming addition to the family due in a few months time the need for some suitable form of transport had to be seriously considered. We had managed so far with the help of bicycles and when the occasion demanded it, the use of the town's erratic bus service. After a great deal of soul searching we decided that a car would be the only practical solution to our transport problem. We had a nest egg of five hundred pounds or so put aside which would be just enough. There was a big question mark though, neither of us could drive or had any experience of cars. I hated the things myself. To be honest, I was frightened at the prospect of learning to drive and of making a fool of myself in the process.

As soon as she was up to it Jean decided that her first priority was to learn to drive. She had a bit more time during the day than me and a great deal more courage than I had! As soon as the time came near for her to take her driving test we went to Dulys the local Ford dealer, and bought a brand new car for cash! – A two door, pale blue Ford Anglia registration number B33993. It was similar to the one that Peter Howes had. Jean still had to get her licence so the car was delivered to the house and stood unused in the driveway for about a week, licensed and insured ready for the road. Jean passed the test at her first attempt: all within three weeks of beginning her driving lessons. Our new car was the same model as the one she had learnt to drive in which made things easier for her. Without hesitation, that very same evening with a brand new driving licence in her handbag, we all went for our first ride to show Thelma and Harley Apsey in Queens Park our new acquisition.

We were very naive in matters relating to cars. It was a matter of learning as we went along. Driving for the first time in a tropical rainstorm we closed the windows and almost immediately the car steamed up and we couldn't see a thing. Jean pulled up at the side of the road and we waited for the "fog" to clear. The "fog" became thicker by the minute but we could still hear other cars continuing to speed past. What were we to do now? How were we to get home? We were puzzled and had no idea what was happening. The rain began to ease so we wound down the windows to get some fresh air and were instantly greeted by brilliant sunshine. We had learned that car windows steam up when they are tightly closed and it is

hot inside. On that first weekend of our proud ownership we drove out to the Matopos, about 25 miles south of Bulawayo. This was the beginning of many enjoyable trips to that beautiful place. It was a real adventure for us.

Pat with Ford Anglia, 1957

Jean with Ford Anglia, 1957

Sometime after this on an overcast and sultry Sunday afternoon the girls were invited to a friend's birthday party. Frilly dresses with sashes and bows were the order of the afternoon, despite the searing heat. The party was at a house five miles from North End, where we lived. The outward journey was great; we really enjoyed the independence of travelling in our own car. About half past four we returned to the house to collect the girls. Out they came together with a flurry of excited children clutching slices of birthday cake wrapped in serviettes and each holding bright balloons. Jennifer and Gillian jumped into the back of the car as if they had always been used to it. They began to tell us about the great time they had had. Jean thought that it would be nice if we went back through town. Both girls quietened down a little as we approached the town centre, but then being tired and wanting to get home began to annoy each other. Jean was trying hard to concentrate as she experienced, for the first time, the rush of the early evening traffic. The rumpus in the back seat continued despite my calls for them to be quiet and behave themselves. The atmosphere was tense and I was on a knife-edge as Jean carefully manoeuvred her way down Main Street towards North End, her emotions fully under control. Suddenly there were two loud bangs from the rear of the car. I was petrified, something must be seriously wrong with this brand new car of ours. I was expecting some further explosions any minute. Jean calmly and without

a word, pulled into a convenient parking space and stopped. There was silence. Then from the back of the car a little voice piped up "Don't be frightened Daddy we only burst our balloons!" Everyone laughed their heads off – except me of course. So began our relationship with cars.

We now decided that it I must to learn to drive. I was extremely nervous and took lessons with the instructor that had taught Jean. As I had to fit lessons in with my work it took me quite a bit longer, I did however, have the added advantage that we now had a car and could drive with Jean as my instructor. When we went out the two girls had to come with us sitting on the back seat watching every move. "Clutch and Brake" they echoed as Jean gave me instruction. Looking back on it the whole operation was hilarious. I failed my driving test at the first attempt. Jean was heavily pregnant and we decided we needed a break before the baby was born. So we took our first holiday with the car. We booked for a week at a small hotel owned by an elderly German couple just outside Fort Victoria. Off we went with no experience at all of driving outside Bulawayo; both of us took turns at the wheel.

The roads from Bulawayo to Fort Victoria in those days consisted of two parallel concrete strips. They were known as "strip roads". You had to hold the steering wheel very firmly in order to stay on these ribbons of concrete. Through constant use the earth at the sides was often worn away just leaving a sharp edge, which could easily damage your tyres. When a car was coming towards you, which thankfully wasn't very often, you needed to slow down and ease off to leave just one side of the car on a strip, the other car passing you and using the other strip. At first I found it a tricky business. It was a bit daunting but you soon got used to it. The journey to Fort Victoria and on to the hotel was accomplished without any trouble.

The hotel food was very ordinary but for what we paid it wasn't bad. Our room was away from the main building and was a conventional rondaaval. Simple and clean, comfortable enough for the four of us. We explored the surrounding area each day and climbed granite kopjes with our two small girls, despite Jean's condition. We visited the ruins of Great Zimbabwe, which were fascinating. We had, by this time, acquired a cine camera. The latest technology of the time – a Kodak Brownie. We used this as a means of keeping our parents in Hemel Hempstead and Stowmarket abreast with the children's progress. We returned to Bulawayo without

incident. For us it was the first of many long journeys by car. I took my driving test again soon afterwards and passed, thank goodness.

On May 19th 1957 Philip Edward was born. The girls welcomed him. They now had a baby brother. He was what I call a long narrow baby and has remained that way ever since. He was a quiet little boy who played a lot by himself. At this time I was Postmaster at Queens Park which was very convenient as it was close to home. Jean was able to have the car and I could easily cycle the short distance to the Office. I enjoyed my work there. I was my own boss with one lady, Mrs Murray, helping me on the counter. As well there were six African postmen and a young African called Richard who helped around the office and acted as the Telegraph messenger. He and I remained friendly for several years. Quite often Jean would bring the children up in the car in the afternoon. Jennifer and Gillian used to enjoy sitting in the post-box and taking the mail as it was posted, much to the amusement of the African customers. There were many interesting customers, one I remember well, Mrs Bloomhill who used to ride to the office on her horse and tie the reins to the railings around the steps leading to the entrance.

OUR FIRST LONG DISTANCE JOURNEY BY CAR

About eighteen months or so after we had acquired the Ford Anglia and had become a little more proficient at driving we decided that a holiday at the Natal coast would be a good idea. Many people from Rhodesia travelled down to Durban and the South Coast of Natal for their holidays so why couldn't we do the same? The car was serviced and ready to go. We had booked into a hotel, which had been recommended to us, at a small resort on the coast by the name of Winkelspruit. I can't remember for how long but I think it was for three weeks.

We had joined the AA, which gave us some sense of security. They provided us with strip maps of the route down through South Africa and names of possible places to stay en route as well as the necessary documentation to get through the border. We just assumed that the car, being new, would give us no trouble. Neither of us had any idea what to do should we break down. I had been brought up where, with father as a motor mechanic and a passion for cars, the mechanical aspect of them was part of everyday life. Growing up in this environment I hated the smell the grease and the dirt that seemed to go with them. As a result I took no interest in cars whatsoever. My knowledge of what went on under

the bonnet of the car was Nil. With luggage for all five of us in the boot off we set. The journey was to take us three days with two night stops.

The first part of our journey took us from Bulawayo down through Gwanda to the border town of Beit Bridge where we crossed the Limpopo and passed through a Customs Post into South Africa. Everything was new and exciting. Our first town was the mining town of Messina from where we travelled south heading for Louis Trichart. Before this however we had to make our way through the Zoutpansberg Mountains down into the town that lay on the other side. Our map told us that the road took us through a pass called Wyliespoort. There had been a great deal of rain in the area a few days beforehand and part of the road had been washed away. It had been temporarily repaired and we wound our way through the mountains slowly but surely on a makeshift road. On each side of the pass the mountains soared above us as we climbed higher. At last we began to descend and came out into the sunlight away from the gloom. Below us lay the small town of Louis Trichart. We proceeded on to the next town, Pietersburg, the children were tired by now and it was time for us to stop for the night. We had come a long way from Bulawayo on our first day with no trouble. We found a hotel and a comfortable room. This was all an adventure for Jennifer, Gillian and Philip and for mum and dad as well.

Early the next morning after we had filled up with petrol we were off on our journey. It was an easy run through to Pretoria. This was the largest town we had ever visited. Jean was driving as we arrived there. It was the lunchtime rush hour and we had never seen so many cars. There appeared to be traffic light after traffic light, but taking her time Jean found her way out of the city. After a break for lunch we were soon out into the countryside again and on our way. We arrived at Ladysmith for our second nights stay. We were now in Natal and by this time tomorrow calculated that we should be at our destination – Winkelspruit. Through out the journey so far we had not travelled at much more than 45mph because going faster than this caused the steering wheel to develop a vibration. We had no idea what was causing this and so stuck to the lesser speed. After a goodnights rest we were soon on our way again and after passing through Pietermarizburg began the descent down to Durban and the coast. We finally arrived at our hotel at Winkelspruit about teatime. It wasn't a posh place but suited us well. The food was reasonable and the cost kind to our pockets. The Indian Ocean sparkling in the sun and

a beautiful beach were just at the end of the hotel garden. It was an ideal place for the children. They deserved it after the long journey of almost 1000 miles. We had made it. Driving into Durban a few days later to have the car serviced were told that the front wheels needed balancing: this would put an end to the vibration and meant that we would now be able to go faster.

We explored the South Coast and went into Durban several times. The sea at Winkelspruit was too rough for swimming with large breakers coming on to the beach. The children enjoyed the warm water at beach's edge and the wonderful sand. During this time Philip found his feet and was soon walking well. It was an enjoyable, relaxing holiday.

The time came for the journey back to Bulawayo, which went smoothly except for our first night's stop. We intended to spend the night at a well know motel called The Bambi Inn, a favourite for many Rhodesians. We arrived there just as it was dusk but found that it was full. It never entered our heads that we might have to book! The receptionist was very helpful, seeing we had three small children. She phoned ahead and arranged accommodation for us at Machadorp a small town several miles further north. It was dark by the time we arrived. We were all very tired and after something to eat soon found our way to bed. In the morning we discovered that this was typical Afrikaans town where English was a foreign language. It must have been forty years behind the times. We were soon on our way again and spent the following night in a beautiful place high in the mountains over looking Louis Trichart. This was our last treat before making our way back home across the Limpopo River and Beit Bridge and finally to 3 Hunt Avenue.

Many years later looking back on this trip we realised just how unprepared we had been in attempting such a long journey in such a small car. Travelling over strange roads with three small children on board. We carried no spare petrol, no water, very little food and no idea of what to do should we encounter any mechanical problems. We just trusted that our two-year-old car would not go wrong. In hindsight perhaps you could say we were just a little foolhardy, but we had a great time – all of us!

THE AFRICAN COUNTER TRAINING SCHOOL

Toward the end of that year I left the Queens Park Post Office to take my first step onto the promotion ladder and returned to the main office in Bulawayo. It was nothing very exciting, supervising in the sorting office

with early mornings and late evenings. The pay was a little better, but not a great deal. I moved around to various other junior supervisory posts including the counters. During this time I was called to the Postmaster's Office. I knew the Postmaster, John Donkin, through St Margaret's Church in North End where I was member of the congregation. He asked me to take on the task of training African men to operate as counter clerks. Why me I thought? He obviously considered that I was the person for the job.

This was in the early years of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The first tentative steps were now being taken towards multi-racialism in the public sector. My task was to train African men to carry out counter duties, initially in the Post Office in Bulawayo. If that project proved to be successful then the training of African counter staff would continue and those qualifying would be sent to work in the other towns in the country including the capital Salisbury. After this African men were to be trained to run rural Post Offices and Offices in the African Townships. Counter clerks were, however, not to be integrated with the white staff but would operate serving only African customers from a separate unit which had been built into the new Post Office buildings, which had recently been built. I was given no guidelines and was able to choose my own candidates from the existing black staff, mainly Postmen.

I worked entirely on my own choosing candidates by setting them simple exams, which I had written. I was subject to no supervision and was given a free hand. I cannot remember receiving any visits from any member of the senior staff or having my progress monitored. I appeared to be the only white person interested in the project. To me it was a real challenge. My Rhodesian colleagues considered what I was undertaking was antisocial and anti-white and there was a hint of hostility towards me. I started off with ten young African men most of whom had been educated at mission schools and spoke fluent English. They were all in their late teens or early twenties. They were willing to learn and it was a pleasure to teach them. I learnt a great deal from them, their culture, their expectations and their eagerness to progress.

I was given a large room in what had been the old Post Office building. Furniture was scrounged from wherever I could find it and teaching aids were made by Jean and I at home in the evenings. We made sheets of postage stamps using sheets of brown paper and Jean's sewing machine and cut up cardboard to make Postal Orders. What we did for money I can't recollect.

We went forward at a steady pace for about six months or so learning about the various aspects of counter work. I then felt that the trainees were ready to put into practice what they had learnt. The time to test my work had finally arrived, and I took the trainees onto the counters where I supervised them for several months. All went well as I had expected. It was an achievement to have got so far despite lack of support and the negative attitude of many of my colleagues. They felt that this was the thin edge of the wedge and was making their jobs at risk. I judged the project was a success.

I then went on to train staff for the counters in Salisbury, Umtali and Gwelo. The Postmasters of Umtali and Gwelo who were of the old school were reluctant to accept African counter staff and did their utmost to refuse to take them when they became qualified; however, after a certain amount of pressure the trainees, despite some initial unpleasantness, took up their posts, and proved their worth. Postmasters were now trained to take over offices in rural parts of the country and especially in areas that were predominantly African. The Training School had expanded and others took over the work from me. My attitude towards my black neighbours had changed and I was able to mix freely with them without prejudice and I hope more understanding. In 1961 the time came for me to hand over the running of the school altogether and I moved on to other areas of work. . .

During my time at the Training School I became socially involved with the young men I was working with. I did a little work with the Bulawayo African football team as their part time treasurer and one Saturday afternoon I was invited with the family to an important football match in the Townships. It was a bitterly cold day and we stayed just for the first half. We visited the Cyrene Mission, an Anglican establishment, just outside Bulawayo where a student had connections. Through another trainee we received an invitation to a wedding reception where we had a seat of honour on the stage of the hall where the celebrations were being held.

During this time leading up to October 1961 the situation in Bulawayo became rather tense especially in the African townships. Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland were heading for independence and the position of Southern Rhodesia became uncertain. It was plainly obvious that the break up of the Federation was in sight. There was fear that rioting would break out and at one time troops were patrolling the centre of the town. It

was rather unsettling, but we just had to carry on. Several of the African young men I got to know through the Training School offered us, as a family, sanctuary should serious trouble erupt, but thank goodness it never came to that.

By this time both Jennifer and Gillian were at Sauerstown Primary School, later known as Hugh Beadle School, and Philip was growing fast. Suggestions came from my parents that they would dearly love to have us with them for the Christmas of that year, 1961. After a great deal of discussion we decided to arrange to make the trip. It was some undertaking, a journey of almost three weeks with three young children. It was necessary to make the bookings for sea voyage from Cape Town to Southampton many months ahead and to arrange finance. Jean was a good organiser and started straight away to make clothes for the children and for her. It would be the beginning of winter soon after we arrived. The cold would be something the children had never experienced. The voyage was financed through a loan that we would pay off over the coming year. The return train fare to Cape Town was a perk that we enjoyed through my job. I had plenty of leave which I was allowed to accumulate. I took four months and cashed the remainder, which gave us some spending money. My salary for the four months was payable through the Rhodesian High Commissioner's Office in London which would give us a little more money to live on whilst we were there. And so preparations for our journey to England began.

SOUTHERN RHODESIA - 1949 – 1966 (Part 3)

BULAWAYO

Thanks to Jean's organisation everything had fallen into place by the second week in October 1961 and we were ready to leave. This time we didn't let the house but left it in the care of our friends Bob and Bunty Palmer who lived nearby. Everywhere was locked up and we took the car round to them; Bunty would use it whilst we were away. The Headmaster of the girls' school gave us permission to take them away from the school for the period of our leave. He said that the experience would probably be more beneficial than them being at school. In the evening they took our entire luggage and us to the station to catch the train to Cape Town. We settled down in our compartment (2nd Class) which could hold six people and so began our three-day journey. It was I am sure an adventure for the children. They had plenty of books and other things to amuse them as well as the countryside to look at. Meals were taken in the dining car, breakfast, lunch and dinner in the evening, which was something to look forward to. Down to the Cape we travelled, through Bechuanaland and then into South Africa, finally arriving at Cape Town. We had arranged to stay on the Union Castle liner, the "Stirling Castle", for three days before she sailed. This would give us time to see a little of the city without having to go to the expense of staying in a hotel.

Cape Town was a beautiful place and the weather was perfect. We took the children by cable car to the top of Table Mountain one day and on another we took the train down to Simonstown. A wonderful trip with the train, on the latter half of the journey, running close to the shoreline. Little did we know then that Cape Town was to become a place to which we would return many times and where Philip would attend university and eventually make his home.

There was great excitement as we prepared to leave the dockside. A little while previously the children had gone, by themselves, down to the quayside to a small kiosk to buy some peppermint rock. I can't imagine why we let them go by themselves but we did. The liners always sailed for Southampton on Thursdays at 4pm. As the hour approached the band began to play alongside and as we left the quay streamers were thrown to the crowds who were there to see the boat off. By this time the rock purchased by the children had all been devoured. As the boat moved out of the harbour into the open sea we hit what is known as the Cape Rollers

a heavy swell that gave the Stirling Castle quite a bit of movement. Soon all three, Jennifer, Gillian and Philip were feeling seasick. We were down in our cabins by this time and up came the rock giving a rather red colour to their afternoon tea. They were all convinced that they were bringing up their tonsils! Gillian and Philip though had already parted with theirs a year or so earlier at the Mater Dei Hospital in Bulawayo.

We were at the start of our two-week sea journey to England. It was to be a wonderful holiday for us all especially for the children. They were given a little work to do in quiet moments. We soon settled down to the routine of life on board it was a relaxing time with plenty for the children to do. They enjoyed swimming in the afternoons, a fancy dress party and the crossing of the Line ceremony.

Social life on board was pleasant enough. We became friendly with a Jewish family from South Africa who, although they didn't say as much, were going to settle in the UK. There were several dances in the evenings and one or two cinema shows.

As we came into the Northern Hemisphere we approached the Canary Islands where we docked at Las Palmas and went ashore for a short time. It was then on, through the Bay of Biscay where the sea was rather rough, and finally to Southampton. There was great excitement in the early morning as we drew alongside the quay. We tried to spot Grandma and Granddad Smith whom we knew had come to meet us. The process of disembarkation was tedious but at last came the moment when the children met their Grandparents for the first time. Then came the long car journey to Hemel Hempstead ending with our arrival at my parents' home 64 Lawn Lane.

There was much to explore and many things that Jennifer, Gillian and Philip had not seen before. We went for walks along the Grand Union Canal, collected horse chestnuts (conkers) on the Moor and ran through the piles of autumn leaves that had collected under the trees. The cold weather and the lack of sunshine were something that we all had to get used to. My Father had purchased a small car for us to use, which helped us to get around on our own. It was a black Ford Popular and was similar to drive as our own Anglia back in Rhodesia. We made good use of it during our stay. Soon after we had arrived it was Jennifer's 11th birthday on the 25th October. My Mother took her into town and bought her a lovely red dress. It is difficult after all this time to bring to mind all that

we did. We bought the children warm duffel coats and Jean borrowed a winter coat from my Mother. Jean and I took the girls up to London to visit St Pauls Cathedral, we visited the Tower of London and the nearby Royal Mint and finally visited the Royal Mews at Buckingham Palace and saw the golden Coronation Coach. It was a wonderful if rather tiring day.

It was an exciting time for my parents with Christmas approaching. Dad went shopping for a train set for Philip and we bought bits and pieces to go with it. As the day approached there was a tree to be purchased and we arranged to go to see a Pantomime at Golders Green Hippodrome on Boxing Day. It is difficult to believe that we drove up to the theatre to purchase tickets on the M1 motorway which was then only a few years old. Christmas was a real family affair. I drove the little car down to Reading to fetch Aunt Phyl and my cousin Joyce who were to stay with my Grandfather in Southill Road. They bought a very large turkey with them for the Christmas dinner. I believe they had won it in a raffle.

Hemel Hempstead had altered since we left in 1949. It had been designated a New Town in 1948 and the process of regeneration had begun and the Marlowes end of the town had now become the focus instead of the Old Town. The town that I had grown up in was fast becoming a thing of the past. It is strange to think that Gillian, who was 7 years old at the time, should in 1973 make this place her home.

My Mother and Father were delighted to have the children with them and to be able to buy them little things. Philip had a cowboy hat from which he was inseparable and a plastic model airliner bought from the market.

Soon after Christmas, just before the New Year, we drove over to Stowmarket. It was a bitterly cold day and the Ford Popular had no heating. The car had no boot as such and our cases were strapped onto a kind of carrier at the back. With a flask of hot drink and blankets we set off. It was a little different to a Sunday afternoon trip to the Matopos Hills. There was no direct route to Suffolk and we made our way across country to Bury-St-Edmunds and from there on to Stowmarket. I remember it took us the best part of four hours. It was freezing all the way and there was ice on the roads. I could hardly feel my feet. The children seemed snug enough beneath the rugs on the back seat.

We soon settled in at 177 Stowupland Road, Stowmarket and Jennifer, Gillian and Philip all enjoyed watching Television. On New Year's Day it was still freezing hard and we had several thick falls of snow. There

was no garage or shelter for the car so Jean's father drained the radiator of the car and removed the battery. The engine was covered in old blankets. Gradually the snow thawed and the battery returned to its rightful place and the radiator topped up. The car started first time and we were able to get out and about visiting Lavenham, Kersey and other places round about. We paid a visit to Colchester to see my Uncle Son and Aunt Ethel. He had now retired from the Metropolitan Police force where in latter years he had been on the police staff at Buckingham Palace. They made a fuss of the children as they had no children of their own.

Time was up and towards the end of January we had to return to Hemel Hempstead to get ready for our return to Bulawayo. We motored back to Hemel Hempstead; again the journey took us the best part of four hours. Now it takes just two hours or less. Arriving back the trunk had to be packed and room to be found for the many bits and pieces that we had accumulated during our stay. A very large holdall that was still with Mum and Dad, a relic from my days in India, was hauled out from its hiding place and filled with all the toys that the children had been given. The trunk and the holdall were taken down to the railway station and consigned to the Union Castle liner, "Caernavon Castle", at Southampton docks. The last few days were filled with talking about what we had seen and done. We had all had a wonderful time.

The day came for us to leave and Dad drove us all down to Southampton where we were to embark. We had arranged for Mum and Dad to join us for lunch aboard, a lovely end to our holiday. The liner sailed at 4pm and we were on our way back to Cape Town.

On the liner during our voyage back to Africa we became friendly with a young couple Ray and Sylvia Switzer who came from Southampton , by coincidence we found out that they were on their way to Bulawayo to join the Rhodesian Post Office. They were good company and became close friends. They had two children, a girl and a boy of a similar age to our three. After our arrival in Cape Town we all travelled up by train to Bulawayo. For Ray and Sylvia and their family an adventure, for us a long trek. At least this time Jean and I had company and the children some new friends to play with.

Arriving back in Bulawayo we settled into life once more at 3 Hunt Avenue. The Switzers were found a flat by the Post Office. At first they had no washing machine and other essentials so we helped them out

with their washing and made them welcome to our home. A school was quickly found for the children and they all began to enjoy life in their new country. It didn't take them very long to settle into their new home. After several months in England there was a lot of catching up to do, but it was good to be back in our own home again.

It was about this time that I was approached by the Rector of St Margaret's, North End, Richard Thelwall, who asked me if I would fill the vacant post of Lay Reader at the Church. Bob Palmer who had held the post had been transferred to Gwelo. He was a friend of mine and so I was well aware of the work that was involved. I was reluctant to take up the post at first but was finally persuaded to do so after many months of deliberation. This was a decision that was to alter my life considerably over the next twenty years. I was admitted as a Reader by the Bishop of Matabeleland, the Rt. Rev. Kenneth Skelton at the church of St Margaret of Scotland, North End Bulawayo on the 2nd of November 1962.

Life carried on for the next year or so on without any upheavals. Jean became increasingly involved with the local WI and me with the Church. Social tennis formed a major part of our weekend activities. Jennifer and Gillian continued with their involvement with the Girl Guides and Brownies. Philip started school in 1963 and became totally absorbed. He couldn't get enough of it and it proved to be a solid foundation for his future career as a civil engineer. At work I was promoted to what is now known as "Middle Management" and became the accountant for the Bulawayo Post Office from which I enjoyed a great deal of job satisfaction. I had a small staff but worked with the minimum of interference which suited me.

Life continued peacefully, despite the political uncertainty that came with the demise of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland went their own separate ways to become the independent states of Zambia and Malawi. Southern Rhodesia now called Rhodesia was left in limbo with the British Government reluctant to make a decision as to its future status. The Post Office reverted to its previous position as part of the Rhodesian Civil Service. As employees we had the choice of which country we wished to continued to serve in, or if we wished to leave altogether. Some people, including some friends, did decide to leave. Dave and Jessie Pead and their two children Philip and Michael (Dave worked in the Post Office) suddenly disappeared leaving behind their house and its contents and their car without saying a word

to anyone. It was only many months later that we heard that they had gone back to England. Our friends, Ray and Sylvia Switzer, who were now coming to the end of their three year contract with the Post Office, decided to return to their home town of Southampton as they saw no future in the country. Jean and I were able, for the sake of the family, to put all this to one side, and to continue our pleasant life despite the political uncertainty.

Political tension in Rhodesia grew during the following years, 1964 and 1965, as meetings between the British Government and the Government of Rhodesia continued to be deadlocked on the position of independence for the country. It was obvious that pressure was being put on Great Britain not to grant independence to Rhodesia as long as a white government was in control regardless on any outcome. Perhaps we hid our heads in the sand about the situation, but what else could we do? With a family of three lively children undergoing a decent education, our own house and a good job where did we go if we left? South Africa was out of the question as the situation there was not to our liking. To return to the United Kingdom was not possible we just hadn't the cash to do so! There was little choice but to stay put. The country had been pretty good to us so far.

On the 11th of November 1965 the final crunch came. Because of the continued procrastination by Britain a general election in Rhodesia had brought to power a right wing government. They took the matter into their own hands and declared Unilateral Independence, acknowledging the Queen as head of state. Britain reacted by declaring the Independence illegal and imposed sanctions. Here we were cut off from our English families with threatening noises coming from our native country. Now what do we do was the question in many peoples minds as most of the white population had close ties with Britain. Here we were finding ourselves hated by our fellow countrymen, pariahs of the world. There were attempts at reconciliation between the British Government (Harold Wilson) and the Rhodesian Administration (Ian Smith) but to no avail. Being of British stock with many of us coming through the war years, Ian Smith himself was a Spitfire Pilot with the RAF; we started to make the best of the situation. The government did its best to encourage some form of local patriotism with a new flag and a new national anthem. We had a new President Clifford Du Pont and all the trappings of state with the opening of a new session of Parliament. Sanctions posed a slight problem with the session of British imports. Oil came from South Africa as did various other goods and countries such as Germany, France and Japan

soon came in to fill the void. In many aspects Rhodesia was better off and was reliant on local innovation to supply many of the day to day requirements. A thriving food industry evolved and electrical goods and furniture were being manufactured locally with Germany and France setting up car assembly plants.

What of us a family how did we stand? Should we give up all we had? And perhaps return to Britain having to find another job and somewhere to live. This wasn't possible as the cost of moving would have been prohibitive. At least we had a house which was ours, mortgaged of course, but nevertheless it was in our name. I was not an admirer of the Smith Government as it was beginning to have echoes of the apartheid regime of South Africa. The decision we made was to stay and get on with life. I was at that time in charge of the counters in the Bulawayo Post Office and it was with great reluctance that I oversaw the issue of a stamp to mark the Independence of the country and various other pro-government items. I wasn't in the position to say no, so I just gritted my teeth and carried on and did as I was instructed. Life continued with things much as normal. The children went to school as usual, and Jean and I continued with our various pursuits. Despite the sanctions imposed by Britain the only thing we were a little short of was petrol which became rationed but not to the extent that we had to consider every move. Long journeys though were out of the question.

1966 arrived and the annual time came for me to seek promotion. A list of higher posts for which I was eligible was circulated and I was invited to make a choice of those I favoured. Suitable vacant promotion posts were all within the Post Office Headquarters in Salisbury (now Harare). Jean and I discussed which positions I should apply for. If I wanted to progress then we would have to contemplate a change. After 17 years in Bulawyo perhaps it was time for us to leave. Things moved swiftly and I was awarded promotion to a post within the Post Office Headquarters Accounting section which I accepted. Now we had to tell the children. Naturally they were upset at the thought of having to leave their schools, their friends, the Girl Guides and the church. We had a problem too; because of the effect of "UDI" on the countries financial situation it was difficult to sell property and we had a house to sell. The market was flat and so we had to find means other than to let it. Fortunately for us Rhodesia Railways at the time were looking for places to rent for staff accommodation. This seemed ideal as the payment of rent was guaranteed

and they also undertook the maintenance of the property. The rent of £25 per month that was agreed was perfect as it covered the rental we had to pay for a house in Mabelreign, in Salisbury. We accepted the offer from Rhodesian Railways and now all we had to do was move. Being employed by the Government had its advantages as our removal and travelling costs and even those of our dog Rex were all paid for. We were to travel by overnight train from Bulawayo to Salisbury. Because of petrol rationing the car had to be transported by rail, it was to be put on a truck attached to the train. Our old Ford Anglia was so well used that I am sure it wouldn't have made the journey by road anyhow, let alone with all five of us in it.

The time came to leave Bulawayo with all its many memories. St Margaret's Church in North End where I had been a Lay Reader presented Jean and I with a copper rose bowl and St Katherine's in Queensdale gave me a beautiful Sheaffer fountain pen. The day came for us to leave; I can't remember the exact date, but sometime in early October 1966. We were rather worried about Rex the dog, we knew they had special kennels in the guard's van of the train but were unsure how he would behave as he was a lively animal. We spoke to our local chemist, who we knew well, who suggested giving him a sedative which he gladly supplied. Before we left for the railway station Rex was given his medication. We thought he would be really sleepy when the time came to board the train. Instead he became increasingly excited but was no trouble when being put into his kennel. We heard him barking all the way to Salisbury. Jennifer and Gillian had two white rats as pets and these went along as well. Sleeping in an old bird cage discreetly covered by a white tea towel they were taken into the girls' compartment. The girls had strict instructions not to let the rats out or to play with them, needless to say the instruction was not adhered to. Early the next morning Jean and I, Jennifer, Gillian and Philip accompanied by Rex the dog and the two white rats arrived in Salisbury, there to begin a new chapter in our lives.

RHODESIA

SALISBURY 1966 – 1983

On a morning in early October 1966 we arrived from Bulawayo by train in Salisbury the capital city of Rhodesia the "Southern" having been dropped after the Declaration of Independence the previous year. Well here we are in a new city where we all had to make a new start with new people a different house and for me a new job far removed from what I had been used to for the past seventeen years.

Jean, the girls and Philip, plus Rex the dog and the two white rats took a taxi from the railway station out to the house where we were to live in a suburb of Salisbury called Mabelreign situated several miles from the city centre. I stayed behind at the station to see to the unloading of the car and then to drive out to 9 86th Avenue. After a journey through a much more modern town than Bulawayo with wide sweeping roads leading out to the suburbs I arrived at the house to find it was little short of chaos. The furniture van had arrived from Bulawayo and was off loading our furniture and belongings on to the lawn surrounding the house. At least it was a fine day! The couple from whom we were renting the house (I was taking over his post at Post Office HQ whilst he was moving on to Umtali to take up the post of Postmaster), being of typical Rhodesian stock they had just left everything and gone off to work. Milk still in the fridge, curtains still hanging up, even their clothes still in the cupboards. Jean in her usual manner soon got things organised and the house was cleared in no time at all and our belongings and furniture installed. It was a bit of a squeeze as the house; all though it had the same number of rooms as ours in Hunt Avenue, was much smaller. Anyhow we managed to get everything in. The owner's wife in the middle of all this came back as she had forgotten some thing; we thought she had come to help – but Oh no! As she was leaving she saw the bird cage with its cloth over it. "I just love birds" she said and whipped off the cloth to be confronted by two large rats. She disappeared very quickly and we saw nothing else of her and we soon we settled in.

Later on during that day after Jean and the girls had gone to do some shopping at the local supermarket when there was a knock at the front door. I went to answer it and found to my astonishment a priest in his cassock. He introduced himself and said "He was Peter Hall the Rector at St Peter's church" and "Was I Pat Smith a Lay Reader from Bulawayo?" I

was astonished as no-one in Bulawayo had any idea of our new address. He wanted to know if I could assist him on the coming Sunday, which I declined to do so. I never found out how he knew about me and he was never forthcoming as to where he had obtained his information.

Things came together, as they always do; the children settled into new schools, and Jean getting on with things as she usually did without any fuss. Work was a new challenge and I missed being face to face with the public. Would I ever get used to sitting in an office with the door closed and all alone poring over pages of computer produced lists of figures? It was a case of making new friends as well. There was a fairly large staff, mainly women in the Accounts Branch to which I was attached. I soon settled in and got on with my new job which I must admit I didn't like very much.

On the home front things were a little tight money wise as the salary rise I attained on my promotion was not all that great, but at least it was one more step up the ladder. We had to forgo the employment of a servant as our income didn't run to that. This was no hardship as we were all capable of looking after ourselves. Jean soon joined the local branch of the WI and became involved quite quickly. I took up my role as a Lay Reader at the Parish Church of St Peter's. The priest Peter Hall left soon afterwards, and being the only active Reader in the Parish, I was faced with an interregnum. More about my involvement with Church can be found under the account of my spiritual journey "Why me Lord?"

Apart from my Church work and work at the office I had little time for anything else, not that I was overstretched. Girl Guides became an important part of Jennifer and Gillian's lives in which they played an active role. Jennifer was in her last year at Mabelreign Girls High School and sat her "O" levels, she was not very academic and did as well as she could. Work in the civil service was considered reasonable employment. She applied and found herself working as a registry clerk with the CID Headquarters of the British South African Police (BSAP). This was something that she really liked and soon settled into the work where she stayed until she was transferred to the BSAP headquarters in a similar capacity. It was whilst there that she became a keen member of the Police Choir. Gill after one year at junior school went onto Mabeleign Girls High School whilst Philip continued at Hallingbury School. Jean meanwhile found herself a small job checking football coupons which helped with the family finances.

The government at this time was putting out a great deal of propaganda about how great the country was and how proud we should be of all that had been achieved since UDI. The new Rhodesian flag was given great prominence. On the morning of 11th November 1968, I think it was a Sunday; the new flag was raised in Jameson Avenue in front of a statue of Cecil Rhodes. I took Philip along to see the ceremony. We didn't see very much though as he decided to be sick at an appropriate time!

At long last the old Ford Anglia car, that we had had for well over 10 years, became a liability and the time came for us look for another one. It was common news in the Accounts Branch that I was looking for another car. One of the ladies on the staff who liked to know all about peoples lives informed me that there was a second hand one that might suit my needs, at a sale room nearby. I went along later and had a look at a Japanese Isuzu Bellette, a four door family car, much bigger and with a great deal more room than the Anglia. Jean and I talked it over and decided that we could afford it and bought it on Hire Purchase. They even gave us a trade in on the old car, which to be honest was only fit for the scrap heap. The Bellette took a bit of getting used to as it was a much larger and more powerful car; but it was a good buy, sturdy and easy to drive. Jennifer, Gillian and Philip all learned to drive in it and we took it down on holiday to the Natal coast several times.

THE 1970'S

From 1970 it was all go for the Smith family for the next ten years. Jennifer, Gillian and Philip were reaching adulthood. I was beginning to make progress on the career ladder. And by the mid – seventies the children had all left home and a new phase of married life started for Jean and I. We weren't quite as strapped for cash as we had been and we were able to stretch our wings a bit.

In the background to all that was happening to us during these years was the continuing guerrilla warfare being waged on the Rhodesian borders with Zambia and Mozambique by so called "Freedom Fighters. " Day to day living in Salisbury and other large centres of the population was not directly affected. Many people were called up for military service and young men on reaching the age of 18 were conscripted into the armed forces. There was, however, a certain amount of underlying tension caused by news of frequent action by the Rhodesian armed forces and of casualties suffered. Throughout this period the Government tried hard to

engender a sense of patriotism, especially in schools and in the media. For us though, life continued very much as normal.

My promotions followed due to the influence of my now good friend John Anderson whilst the family carried on with their various activities. Jean became increasingly involved with WI affairs. We both played quite a bit of social tennis at weekends; neither of us was very good at it. Jean was a great deal better at the game than I was. At least it kept us fit. In August 1970 from information I gleaned from my sister Anne my Father was not too well with diabetes and had a prostate problem which had put him into hospital. With the help of John Anderson, who had contacts in the Telecommunications division of the Post Office, I was able to speak on the telephone to my Mother who was staying with Anne. Father obviously was not at all well and I gathered that they would be very pleased to see me.

It was decided that I should make the trip to England to be with my Mother. I borrowed several hundred pounds from Jennifer as we did not have enough money to fund the trip. There was no way that I could obtain a British Passport in such a short time as all applications had to go to the British Embassy in South Africa. I took a chance and went on a Rhodesian Passport which I knew was illegal in Britain. At the beginning of August I took my first long haul flight, since my return from India to England in 1946. I left from Salisbury airport flying to Heathrow on a South African Airways Boeing 707. I remember being dressed in a suit and collar and tie a far cry from what one would wear now days. On arriving at Heathrow I presented myself to passport control showing them that I had a Rhodesian passport. I was immediately taken to one side and was made to wait for at least two hours whilst checks were made on my reasons for coming. I had come prepared with my birth certificate and a letter from my Mother telling me that my Father was in West Herts Hospital Hemel Hempstead. Eventually I was released and my Rhodesian passport confiscated. Anne and Derek had come to meet me and had become worried because I had not appeared. They had checked to see that I had arrived on the flight. They were not very pleased on knowing how I had been treated on my arrival. My plan was to stay in England for four weeks. It was a very hot August and my shorts were well used. I drove Father's car and I was able to take Mother around and to the hospital to visit. I also paid a brief visit to Stowmarket to see Jean's family.

I needed a passport to return to Rhodesia and had to make a visit to the Passport Office in London. A week before the end of my stay Anne and I went up to make my application. I received a very frosty reception from a member of staff who very obviously did not have much time for a rebel colonialist from Rhodesia. I was granted a British Passport more or less under sufferance. It arrived just one day before I was due to return home. The family had been told that Father has prostate cancer but that he was in no danger of it spreading.

After a pleasant flight back to Salisbury in a half empty plane I had a short rest and was off to a wedding with a splitting head ache.

About this time I found myself acting as the Assistant Chief Accountant. I was in fact virtually the Chief Accountant. The man in the post, whose name I cannot remember, was almost due for retirement and was a chronic alcoholic. I found myself taking on all his responsibilities whilst he was by-passed and just left get on with doing very little. I had an extremely interesting job at this time. It had been realised that there was money to be made by the Post Office from the issuing of Commemorative Postage Stamps. A committee was formed to decide on the subjects to be used. Their results were passed to me; it was then my job to organise the art work, photography and design, to oversee the production of the stamps and finally to write the publicity that would accompany the issue of First Day Covers. I also liaised with a new Philatelic Bureau that had been set up to market the stamps. This was extremely interesting work and brought me in to contact with artists and many other people. I also found myself discussing the proposed stamps with the Postmaster General and from time to time with the Chairman of the Board. I really was flying high! It didn't make any difference though to my salary. I just benefited from the experience.

During the latter half of 1970 the Post Office was transferred from the authority of the Rhodesian Civil Service to become a quasi government organisation known as the Posts and Telecommunications Corporation of Rhodesia. It had its own governing body comprising of a Chairman and board of Directors and was a semi-autonomous concern within Government. I was now given instant promotion by passing at least fifteen or more people above me on the seniority list which caused a great deal of ill feeling among my peers. This ill feeling followed me for the next five or six years. My work had now taken me into a new section within the Post Office Headquarters and into a new hierarchy which had been

established entitled "The Finance Branch". I had not applied for the new position but had been singled out to fill this post. The Finance Branch and its Director were responsible to the Postmaster General and the Chairman of the Board for all matters relating to finance. My immediate boss was now John Anderson who remained a very good friend. I soon realised that it was he who had chosen me to be his deputy and that the branch was a "closed shop".

My work consisted of analysing the monthly working results of the Corporation's Income and Expenditure, comparing them with the budgeted figures. I then had to write a report on my findings for presentation to the Board of Directors at their monthly meeting. So began the honing of my writing skills which I was able to extend to the writing of sermons as a Lay Reader within the Anglican Church.

It was about this time (1970) that Jennifer first met with Con Adlam on a blind date. It was obviously love at first site as the relationship quickly blossomed. Jean unfortunately did not like Con with his Afrikaans origins which lead to strained feelings between them. Despite this Jennifer and Con were determined to stay together and announced that they wanted to become engaged. This led to even more tension which came to a head when they said that they wanted to get married. Jennifer was just 20 at the time.

It was also about this time, 1970, that Philip left his primary school, Hallingbury, as he was now due to go on to secondary school. He transferred to Allan Wilson School where entry was by selection only. The school specialised in the teaching of Maths and the sciences subjects which led to careers in engineering. Philip excelled in all he did.

Jean's father had died in 1970. So in 1971 she decided to go and visit her mother in Stowmarket for four weeks which spread over the end of September and the beginning of October, returning about a week before the wedding for which Jennifer and Con had made all the arrangements themselves. It was a quiet wedding at St Peter's Mabelreign with Gill as the only bridesmaid. Because of the confused political situation at the time it was necessary to have two priests to conduct the wedding. One priest to perform the actual wedding ceremony and the other to conduct the service. This had the effect of making the wedding legal outside Rhodesia. The ministers were David Rymer, Rector of St Peter's and John Fall an Army Padre who was not attached to the Rhodesian branch of the

Anglican Church. There was a small reception in the Church Hall. After their honeymoon Jennifer and Con moved into a small flat in the centre of Salisbury and began their married life.

We were getting tired of living at 9 86th Avenue in Mabelreign and so in 1972 we decided to try and sell our old house, 3 Hunt Avenue, Northend, Bulawayo. Mrs Thelwall the Rector's wife at St Margaret's, our old church in Bulawayo, gave us one or two leads and we finally managed to sell the property. We didn't make much profit on it, but enough to give us a deposit on a house in Salisbury. There was a building scheme going ahead in the nearby suburb of Strathhaven. We decided to go ahead and have a house built. We chose to have a large three bedroom bungalow on a half acre plot. It was to be much bigger and better equipped that anything we had had before. My salary at this time was such that we could afford it. The plans showed the house, 22 Birchley Avenue, to be very spacious with the added luxury, at that time, of an ensuite bathroom. It was very exciting to see the house go up and it was much bigger that we had anticipated. There was only one problem though! It became obvious that the house would not be finished in time. The date for completion of the house grew nearer. We had already given notice to vacate 9,86th Avenue, Mabelreign which we were renting and the new tenant wanted to move in. The builder informed us that the house would be another two weeks before it was finished and we could take up residence. We had no other option but to move out, put our furniture in storage and find somewhere else to stay in the meantime. We could not afford to all live in a hotel. Jennifer and Con suggested that for the meantime we could occupy the floor of the lounge in their one bedroom flat. As soon as our plight was known help quickly materialised. John and Leonie Anderson offered Jean and me one of their bedrooms, Gill went to stay with a school friend and Philip stayed with Jennifer and Con. Their flat became our Headquarters. Jean spent the day there and she and I ate our evening meal there. We visited the building site every evening to monitor progress on the house. The builder was true to his word and the house was completed and at last we were able to move in which we did on the 21st September 1971.

It was all that we had dreamed of. Three double bedrooms with large built in wardrobes a spacious fitted kitchen with a walk in pantry, a very large lounge and dining room. The lounge at the front of the house had floor to ceiling windows with French doors opening on to a patio and the front garden. The dining room was similar with French doors opening

on to a small patio and the garden at the side of the house. Outside a big lock up garage and servant's quarters with electricity and running water which then was something unusual? We retrieved our furniture from storage and moved in. What a difference from the house in Mabelreign, the furniture looked a little tired and lost in such a spacious new house. The surrounding half an acre of garden needed a great deal of work doing to it. It was in fact a blank canvas on which we had to work.

The area in to which we had now moved was thought of as being of a higher status than Mabelreign. At last we had now moved up in the world to Strathaven, though it was only a mile further down the road. If moving into a new house wasn't enough there was more to come. The next year, 1973, was the year of my parent's Golden Wedding. Somehow or other we had to go and be with them. At the same time Gill began to see the bright lights of England shining and beckoning to her. So besides Jean, I and Philip planning to go overseas Gill was also doing so, hopefully all of us travelling at the same time. I was not too sure where all the money was coming from but we now realised that we were at last feeling the benefit of several previous promotions and were better off than we thought we were.

We told Gill that she would have to finance herself and that we would want her to have a return ticket just in case things didn't turn out as she had planned and she needed to come back home. She was working in the Rhodesian Civil Service at the time which did not pay a great deal. Determined to find the funds somehow or other, and being an accomplished dressmaker she took on some sewing. At the same time, together with her friend, she took an evening and weekend job as a waitress in a restaurant with a German theme, called the "Edelweiss". Waiters in most hotels and restaurants were African and it was most unusual at that time for such jobs to be done by white girls. Nothing was going to stand in her way and she achieved her goal by saving enough to purchase a return air ticket from Salisbury to London. We planned to fly to England at the beginning of May. Gill wanted to fly on her own though and left Salisbury on the 31st of March. We had arranged for her to be met at Heathrow airport by my sister Anne with whom she would stay. We followed later in April. To make the journey more interesting and so that Jean me and Philip could see a little bit of Europe we stopped over for a few days in Zurich and then Munich.

In Zurich we stayed in a funny little hotel. It was the first time that we had come across duvets. We weren't quite sure what it was that was rolled up on the end of the bed. During our stay there we booked a short tour which took us by cable car to the top of Mount Pilatus. The final leg of the trip to the summit was in small cars holding just four passengers; I ended up with three Japanese tourists who couldn't speak English. A silent journey!

Munich was much more interesting. The flight from Zurich was short so we just had time on our arrival to visit the Deutsche Museum before closing time. Philip was eager to see their collection of German aircraft. It was a hurried walk from the hotel where we were staying. We were cautious about using the trams in case we got lost. On the way back to the hotel we booked a trip for the next morning which was to take us out for most of the day. We visited the Linderhof Palace and Neuschwanstein Castle. To reach the Castle we had to walk up a very steep road with snow on either side which wound through a wooded hillside. It was the first time that Philip had seen snow and he was fascinated by it and he just had to see what it tasted like. After our visit to this fairytale Castle we had lunch and then drove on to the village of Oberammeragau where we visited the theatre in which the acclaimed Passion play is performed every ten years. For most of the time we were travelling through the magnificent scenery of Bavarian Alps.

On the morning of the next day we flew from Munich into London to be met by Mother and Father, Anne and Derek and of course Gill. We stayed with Mother and Father at 64 Lawn Lane. Philip only stayed with us for about ten days as he had to return to Salisbury to sit his O level examinations, flying back to Salisbury on his own via Johannesburg.

The weekend after Philip's departure Mother and Father celebrated their Golden Wedding anniversary. It was Saturday the 19th of May fifty years to the day on which they were married at St John's Boxmoor. Celebrations started with a private Communion Service just for family, Jean, I and Gill, Anne, Derek and their two children Alison and Angus, and Aunt Phyl, Uncle Clifford and Cousin Joyce. We all then moved on to Anne's house for lunch. In the evening, still at Anne's house, there was a party. All of Father's five half- brothers and half- sister and his sister, Aunt Con were there. It was good to see besides the Bride and Groom the bridesmaids, Aunt Con, Aunt Cis (who was a friend of Mother's) and my Cousin Joyce and Father's best man Bernard Clamp, Aunt Cis' husband. It was a great occasion.

On the Sunday following the Golden Wedding celebration I had been asked by the Vicar of St John's Boxmoor to preach at the morning service. Mother, Father and Aunt Phyll came to hear me. It brought back many memories of my days in the choir. Afterwards in the vestry the Vicar told me that there had been two Professors of theology in the congregation. I was very pleased that I didn't know. Mother told me that Father had cried as he listened to me preaching. During the following week, just before her birthday on the 5th of June, Gill, having obtained a job in London, had found herself a bed-sit in Kilburn, London. Jean, I and Anne went up to see her settled in. The accommodation didn't look very salubrious and as we left we felt a bit worried about her.

We then moved on to Stowmarket to visit Jean's family. We left Hemel Hempstead by train leaving Boxmoor Station for Stowmarket via Euston and Liverpool Street. Father drove us to the station but neither he nor Mother would come on to the platform to see us off. They said their goodbyes at the entrance. Mother cried bitterly. It was the first time that I had ever seen her so upset. At no time either during the war years, or later when we had gone back and forth to Rhodesia had she shown such emotion. Soon after we had arrived in Stowmarket we received a 'phone call from Father asking if he and Mother could drive down to visit us on the following Sunday. Of course we agreed and Jean's family were only too pleased to see them and to give them lunch. They left soon afterwards. This time there were no tears. I have often wondered since if Mother realised then that this was the last time she would see us, for just over a year later she died. After a week in Stowmarket it was time to return to Salisbury. We made our way to London where we met Gill. From there we travelled by bus to Heathrow. I think that by now Jean and I were both ready to get back to our normal life once more. We had done a great deal in those weeks in which we had been away.

Back at 22 Birchley Avenue we set about developing the garden, with the help of African gardeners. We paid them a reasonable wage and provided them with accommodation, food and clothes to work in so they, in their terms, were not badly off. Our finances were on the up and up. As part of the garden development we decided to have a swimming pool built at the rear of the house. It was of a good size and one in which you could have a decent swim. We erected some woven fencing around it to give ourselves a modicum of privacy. The only drawback, if you can call it that, was that the pool had to be maintained to high standards of hygiene. This

was imperative in the hot climate. After several months we employed a very efficient servant/gardener who was very intelligent. He soon took over the maintenance of the pool and did it extremely well. His name was Gulliver, a very likeable young man.

In the meantime Gill had settled in Hemel Hempstead and felt that her future lay there rather than back in Rhodesia. It turned out afterwards that she had met Ray Reynolds who she was later to marry. Gill and I had a long conversation via a teleprinter link to discuss what she should do. On 19th December 1974 she arrived back in Salisbury for a three week visit, which included Christmas with us all. It was good to see her and to know that she was really enjoying life in England.

Philip was doing very well at Alan Wilson School and after he had taken his "O" Level examinations in June 1973 he progressed to the sixth form to study for his "A" Levels which he took in 1975, with splendid results. We were justly proud of his achievements for which he had worked very hard. Philip left school at the end of that year. He had a few weeks before he was due to be called up into compulsory military service and took a clerical job in the Post Office Telecommunications section which I had arranged for him. A few months later he was called to serve for one year in a branch of the Rhodesian Internal Affairs Department. A semi-military organisation. Its purpose was to provide protection to African villagers from the insurgents coming into the border areas. After training Philip was sent to be in charge of a "Protected Village" in the Northern part of the country adjacent to Mozambique. He had a small band of African soldiers for protection and was the only white person in that particular tribal area. It was a formidable task for a young man of 18. He enjoyed his time and taught maths in the local schools.

SILVER WEDDING CELEBRATIONS

The 29th October of 1974 saw Jean and I celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary. What a very happy 25 years they had been. We hadn't escaped our share of ups and downs, times of ill health for Jean, and worries about the political situation. We had a great deal to be thankful for. I had a good job and Jean was working at the High Court. She was involved with people sorting out wills in the Probate Division which she very much enjoyed. We decided to throw a party one evening to celebrate our Silver Wedding anniversary. It was at the end of October and we felt assured that the evening that would be warm and that we and our guests could sit around

the swimming pool. Everything was set out, coloured lights in the trees, all the pool lights on. It all looked very welcoming. Jean had purchased a special evening dress for the occasion, silver with a touch of pink in the design. She looked very glamorous especially to me. Our friends began to arrive and started to gather in the garden. Suddenly the wind got up and it turned cold and windy. It was not the kind of weather to sit outside, especially for the ladies in their evening dresses. We had no option but to move the party indoors. Despite this upheaval the celebrations went well thanks to Jean's organisation ability. It was a great evening.

On the fifth of June 1975 Gill celebrated her 21st birthday in Hemel Hempstead with her friends most of whom she still has. We booked a phone call so that we could give her our Best Wishes. Our conversations were interspersed with tears from Gill and tears from Jean. I managed to hold mine back.

I was still steadily climbing my career ladder. My friend John Anderson, just senior to me in the Finance Branch at the Post Office Had Quarters, suffered a very serious heart attack in the latter part of 1976. As a consequence he was advised to retire and to return to England away from the high altitude of Rhodesia. I subsequently took over his post as Manager Finance in April 1977. It was a case of being in the right place at the right time, though in rather unfortunate circumstances. I lost a very good friend. We were now able to afford a brand new car and we purchased a white Citroen Club. We were also able to buy Jean a car, a Renault 4. By this time we had also refurnished the house and were very comfortable indeed. The garden at 22 Birchley Avenue had been developed with lawns at the back and front, trees, rose bushes and flower beds and of course our swimming pool. We were justly proud of our garden.

At the beginning of 1977 Philip finished his National Service. He was retuning at the end of his tour of duty, on his way back to Salisbury, and was involved in a serious road accident. He was very fortunate and suffered only minor injuries, the loss of a small finger and a broken wrist. He ended up in hospital, but only for a short while. Gill was over from England at the time on a visit for three weeks. It was so good to see her home again. She had now made up her mind to settle in England, most likely in Hemel Hempstead where she had made many friends. We were very happy about this; it was good to see her pursuing her own ambitions. At the end of her stay we were sorry to see her go but with the feeling that we would be seeing more of her in the future. Little did we realise that it

would be a great deal more. Philip was still in hospital on the day she left and on her way to the airport to catch the plane back she called in to say goodbye.

Philip had been very fortunate in obtaining a bursary awarded to him by Robert's Construction, a Civil Engineering firm based in Cape Town South Africa. This enabled him, with all fees paid, to study for a degree in Civil Engineering at the University of Cape Town. His time spent on National Service had made him very self sufficient. So off he went by train from Salisbury to the Cape at the end of January 1977 with his wrist still in plaster into what for him was unknown territory. We had no contact with him for the first few months, perhaps just the odd letter. We knew nothing about how he was getting on or what he was doing. We were unable to telephone him as he had no number to call. We provided him a monthly allowance which we were able to afford which enabled him to live fairly comfortably.

At the end of Philip's first academic year at University Jean and I decided to take a holiday at the Cape, and to meet Philip after he had finished and bring him back to Salisbury. We planned to motor down in our new Citroën car, some 1600 miles. The first part of our journey took us via Fort Victoria and because of the risk of attack from insurgents we travelled in armed convoy from there to the border with South Africa at Beit Bridge. The journey was uneventful. Crossing Beit Bridge we came into the Northern part of South Africa and drove down through the Eastern Province via Bloemfontein and then into the Eastern Cape stopping at Queenstown and bypassing East London arrived in Grahamstown. From there we travelled on, skirting the suburbs of Port Elizabeth, to join the coast road at Jeffery's Bay. This route would take us along the Garden Route and through the Western Cape and finally on to Gordon's Bay at the North end of False Bay. A beautiful spot and a lovely hotel. We caught up with Phil at the University of Cape Town and after two weeks holiday went into pick him up from Smuts Residence on the University campus for the return journey back to Salisbury.

He was a little hazy; probably he was suffering from too much celebration at the end of his first year. He slept on the back seat of the car for the first hundred miles or so on our journey north. After a night's stop at Parys we continued through Johannesburg and onward to the border with Rhodesia at Beit Bridge. After another night stop we joined an armed convoy for the journey to Fort Victoria. Philip had been longing to drive and so he

took the wheel. We arrived at Fort Victoria safely and without incident but feeling the stress at the thought of what might have been lurking at the side of the road. We decided to have a rest and to relax before continuing. Coffee and a slice of chocolate cake were called for. I told Phil to pull into a parking at the side of the road. As he was doing so a car overtook on the left hand side, hit us and dented a front wing very badly. So much for my new car. We really needed our coffee after that. After a good rest and seeing that damage wasn't too bad we continued on our way back home.

Phil found it good to be home after a year away. Being back though had its downside. Because of his National Service commitment with the Internal Affairs Department and the continuing state of emergency he was required to do duty for several weeks out in the bush. Afterwards he was permitted to return to Cape Town to do required work experience for the remainder of his vacation. Jean and I were never aware of his experiences during those weeks in the bush at the end of 1977, or how traumatic they were. He never talked about it.

Philip's account of what happened to him when serving with "Internal Affairs" and the feelings it engendered.

It took him 35 years after these events for him to come to terms with his experiences.

I never saw any combat, never fired my rifle in anger and never hit a landmine… but during my time in the bush/protected villages I was in constant fear of something happening. Travelling around we were usually in two's or three's in Landrovers without radios or backup and vulnerable to ambush or landmines. In the villages I never felt particularly safe with the DA's armed with their vintage 303 rifles. . . . . and not sure how brave they (and I) would be if we were attacked. I heard stories of a farmer who had been tortured and killed by terrorists and that didn't help my 18 year old imagination.

The worst bush trip for me was the one I did after my first year at university in December 1977. I spent three weeks in the Mount Darwin area, which was quite "hot" at the time. There was a new DC and he wanted to know the full extent of all the assets in the district, so as an intelligent university student I was tasked with visiting very PV in the area and counting every bed, table, chair, fridge, water pump, rifle etc. . . . including all the serial numbers. This meant travelling virtually every day and traversing every road in the place… with the consequent high risk of ambush or landmines.

Twice I travelled along a road and then there was a landmine incident the day after. . . . . and the first time it was the very INTAF truck that I'd been on. I went out to the incident with some army guys… can't remember why.

At the beginning of the trip one of my school mates, Charlie Dawkins, was killed on patrol near the village I was in at the time. He was also on call up from university and in the army. I heard about it soon after, but only found out it was him later when I read the situation reports when I was back in the Mount Darwin headquarters for a day.

I spent Christmas at Mukumbura and then drove out to Mount Darwin soon afterwards. In addition to the usual apprehension I had a loose stomach and wasn't coping very well with the heat of the Zambezi valley. When I got home to Birchley Ave I was feeling completely shattered and can clearly remember lying on my bed in the dark that evening. I wanted to cry; but I couldn't. I wanted to ask Dad to hold me and comfort me. . . . . but I couldn't. I just bottled up the feelings and stayed in my room.

Early in the January I went back to UCT to do the workshop practice in the civil engineering department workshop that had been arranged for me. I remember going back to residence at the start of the academic year in February with a big black cloud around me. . . . . a strong feeling of the closeness of the war and death and very little optimism for the future. I decided that I had to concentrate on chasing some women as I wasn't too sure how long I'd be around! "

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1978 began with good news from Gill in Hemel Hempstead, she and Ray had got engaged, but had not yet fixed the date of the wedding. Jean and I continued to enjoy life, despite the terrorist threat and insurgency in the north of the country. There was a certain amount of tension in daily life which carried on as normal. Reports of loss of life among the armed forces, many of whom were conscripts from civilian life were published daily. I began to wonder where it was all going to end. Looking back in hindsight I realise that a great deal of the prevailing situation was kept from us and only favourable news published.

At this time we were both heavily involved with the Samaritans. Jean was in charge of the rota of listeners and I was the Deputy Director, besides undertaking our fair share of telephone duties and visiting clients when the occasion called for it. A very worthwhile organisation which we very much enjoyed working for because in my work I was now the Assistant

Director of Finance within the Posts and Telecommunication Corporation. A formidable title but not half as grand as it sounds! At least I was in sight of the top of my career ladder which was something. The question was would I ever get there? There appeared to no chance whatsoever with the Director Finance, Bernard Venning, firmly in place at the top of tree, quite a bit younger than myself, and a qualified Chartered Accountant. I had to be satisfied with what I had so far attained by hard work and with no professional qualifications to my name. I had a good job with a decent salary, a lovely home and a wonderful family. I suppose I really could not ask for more.

A WEDDING IN HEMEL HEMPSTEAD

More news from Gill, she and Ray planned to get married on the 1st of July 1978 in Hemel Hempstead. It would have to be a family occasion and it would great if we could all go. There was no problem for Jean and me, but what about Jennifer and Con and Philip down at University in Cape Town? There was an embargo imposed by the British Government on travel to Britain by Rhodesian citizens. Jean, myself, Jennifer and Philip all held British passports, so there would be no problem about our travelling, but Con was Rhodesian without any British background and if he travelled on a Rhodesian passport he would be denied entrance to the United Kingdom. How could we solve the problem? There was no British representation in Rhodesia at that time and any contact with them had to be made through their Ambassador in Pretoria, South Africa. I wrote to them explaining the situation and our wish to have the whole family attend Gill and Ray's wedding. After consideration the Embassy agreed to grant Con a concessionary British passport, valid only from the time he travelled to the wedding to his return to Salisbury. We could now make plans to go.

We had a few months to make our preparations. New frocks, new suits and of course a hat for the bride's mother. Gill wanted Jennifer to be her Matron of Honour but Jennifer had found herself pregnant. Both she and Con were both thrilled with this as after just over six years of marriage they had given up hope of having a family. In mid-June the five of us, Jean, myself, Jennifer, Con and Philip, up from Cape Town, all full of excitement, left Salisbury on a South African Airways 747 flight for London. We were going to meet someone we had never seen who was to become a new member of our family.

After an uneventful flight with the tension mounting we arrived at Heathrow airport. We were booked into the Tavistock Hotel in Tavistock Square, West London for a few nights so that we could visit some of the tourists' spots. Except for Jean and I it was, for the others, their first time in the city. We thought that it would be interesting to travel up to London by the Underground which now ran up from the airport. It was quite a trek to the station especially with all our luggage and a lengthy and somewhat tiring journey to our destination. The weather was very warm and by the time that we arrived and, especially after the long flight with very little sleep, all we wanted to do was stretch out on our beds. Girls in one room and boys in another. Philip was more interested though in what was going on in the street outside and was hanging out of the window counting the number of Rolls Royces passing by. Suddenly he shouted out "I think that Gill and Ray (that was the name of her fiancé) had just arrived". Con, Phil and I had changed into shorts and were unwashed, unshaven and sweaty. Not the kind of state I would have wished to be in to meet my future son-in-law for the first time! Still this would give him a good idea of what he had let himself in for.

There was a loud shout from Philip who was still leaning out of the bedroom window watching the passing traffic "They are here, they are here". Bleary eyed and rather crumpled we awaited a knock at the door. It seemed quite a while before they arrived at our room and we were soon introduced to Ray. My first impressions were "I like this guy!" There was so much to talk about especially the forthcoming wedding. I am afraid that poor Ray became sidelined in all the family chat and it was soon time for Gill and Ray to return to Hemel Hempstead and us to clean ourselves up.

As this was Con's first visit to England and to London it was a must that we spend several days in London to go to all the tourist spots. Among the to-do list was Westminster Abbey, Madame Tussauds, Buckingham Palace and the Imperial War Museum and of course plenty of window shopping and soaking up the atmosphere of this wonderful place. All a far cry from Rhodesia with its many problems. It was now time to make our way to Hemel Hempstead and the wedding preparations. The hire car, a station wagon with plenty of room for us all and our luggage, arrived at the hotel on time and with Con driving we began our journey. I don't think anyone else had the courage to tackle finding a way through the London traffic!

Con took it all in his stride though never before having driven outside the confines of his home country.

With little or no fuss we arrived safely in Hemel Hempstead. Accommodation was not as easy as it had been in previous years as my mother had died and Dad had sold the house, 64 Lawn Lane, and was now living with Anne and Derek in Somerset. He was having a break and had returned to stay for a while with Aunt Con. So from being altogether for a few days we now had to split up. Jen and Con squeezed into Gill's flat, Mum and I slept at Aunt Con's and Philip went to stay with Ray's mother and father.

It was a real pleasure getting to know Ray's parents who made us all very welcome. It was if we had always known them. We were reassured that Gill was marrying into a lovely family, they had been very kind to Gill and had helped her and looked after her on one occasion appreciating that she was far from her home and family.

All the wedding preparations had been done by Gill and Ray and so there was very little for Jean and me to do in that respect. In no time the wedding day the 1st of July, was here. The wedding was to take place at Hemel Hempstead Parish Church of St Mary, a splendid Norman church just off the Old Town centre, within walking distance from Gill's flat. Con came into his own ferrying us all around, Jean, Jennifer and Philip to the church and me to Gill's place to be ready to escort her to the ceremony. Before we left the bride had a sip of whiskey to calm her nerves. I made her clean her teeth before we left as I didn't want her arriving smelling of booze! It was all done in good humour. A vintage yellow Rolls Royce took us to the church where we met the bridesmaids, Jackie, Ray's sister and Alison, Gill's cousin. It was a rather cloudy day with a stiff breeze that blew us all down through the churchyard.

After a short pause at the West door, with Gill on my arm, we processed down the aisle. I felt very proud of her. She had accomplished so much in the five years since she had arrived in Hemel Hempstead. Her dress was beautiful too! It was good to see so many friends in the congregation who were previously from Rhodesia, and had now settled in England. It was a moment full of pride for us all. It was a joyful and impressive service ending with the signing of the register and all the families processing together through the church to music from the organ and the pealing of the church bells. Outside we met up with my Dad, Aunt Con and Anne

and Derek and our old friends. It was such a happy occasion. Ray's mother and father were such lovely people. We were assured that Gill had married the right man. A reception followed for close family. I made a dreadful speech, I should have known better! Afterwards time was spent in the bar until the evening when we were regaled with all the latest music. Jean and I had time to catch up with our old friends. Ray and Carol Switzer, previously from Bulawayo, now living in Southampton. Dave and Jessie Pead also from Bulawayo now in Bedford. And John and Leonie Anderson from Salisbury who were now living in Devon. All work associates from the Rhodesian Post Office. As the evening celebrations drew to a close Gill and Ray left for a short honeymoon in Clare, Suffolk. Jean and I, after a very full day, returned to Aunt Con's and a quiet time with Dad.

The following day Jean and I, Jennifer and Con, and Philip packed everything in our car and made our way to Stowmarket. Jen, Con and Philip stayed with Sylvia and Dennis, whilst Jean and I stayed with Jean's mother. Gill and Ray came over for the day from Clare where they were staying to complete the family gathering. After our time together, Gill and Ray returned to continue their honeymoon whilst we packed our bags once more and began our travels to visit friends. We made our way to Taunton via Heathrow Airport to drop off Philip where he was to catch a flight back to Cape Town to resume his studies at the University. At Taunton we stayed with Anne and Derek for a few days and whilst there visited John and Leonie Anderson who had now settled in a small village in Devonshire. From there it was on to Southampton to pay a short visit to Carol and Ray Switzer, old friends from Bulawayo. It was great seeing them and recalling the happy days we had had together whilst our children were growing up.

Our time back in England was coming to a close. Whilst Jen and Con made their way back to Heathrow to return to Salisbury, Jean and I returned to Stowmarket for a few days before returning home. What a great holiday we had had and so reassuring to see that Gill and Ray had become the perfect couple. It was hard to leave them behind.

And so we returned to life in Salisbury to edge ourselves back into our everyday lives. In the office it was catching up on the past six weeks, not much had changed, and easing back into the daily routine. The political situation was still tense and the military position dire with sporadic fighting continuing in rural areas with varying intensity and with daily casualties still mounting. Apart from work, Jean's and my involvement

in Samaritans took up much of our spare time, not only doing our stint as Listeners (answering the telephone calls of distressed clients), but in behind the scenes work as well. Jean was responsible for putting together the monthly rota of the fifty or so volunteers who manned the telephones, some considerable task requiring a great deal of patience.

In September of 1978 my Father who was staying with Anne and Derek in Somerset died in his sleep. He was 79. I arranged for John Anderson who lived not far away from them to represent me at Dad's funeral as I was unable to make the journey back

SALISBURY 1980- 1983

My position as Manager Finance, Deputy to the Director Finance Bernard Venning, continued amicably and I found myself acting in his position fairly often when he was away. I never could understand why he always appeared to be so important. I was to find out later that the job more or less ran itself. Any difficult decisions to be made were few and far between and were a rare occurrence. Bernard and Elizabeth his wife gave the odd lunch and dinner parties to members of his senior staff. Jean and I were usually the principal guests. They were held at his house and very formal. We never really enjoyed these occasions which were given I am sure to show us how well versed in the art of entertaining he and his wife were. There were always waiters dressed in white and wearing gloves, dragooned no doubt in from their work in the garden. They probably were looking forward to tucking in to the leftovers after we had all departed. After our meal we were all subjected to lectures on the joys of collecting antiques, of which the Vennings considered themselves to be experts.

Philip was, by this time, half way through his degree course at Cape Town University. We did not hear a great deal from him. Contacting him by phone was a little hit or miss. He was living in shared accommodation outside the University and was often hard to locate. We knew though that he was working hard and determined to succeed and was very capable of looking after himself. During vacation times he flew up to Salisbury for the odd week. He didn't come for longer periods as he was required by the firm that was sponsoring him to work for them as part of his work experience and also he could be called upon to do military service here in Rhodesia. It was good to see him.

Our daily life continued very much as usual with terrorist incursions a daily occurrence in the rural areas mainly on the borders with

Mozambique and Zambia. The daily papers, TV and radio carried news of our armed forces retaliation. The life in the city, Salisbury, was quiet and we went about our work in the normal way. In the evenings we went to the theatre, to the cinema, and when we felt like it to dinner at one of the many restaurants or hotels. Money was not a problem as we managed pretty well. We were able to afford a new car every three years as well as Jean having one of her own. The top of my career ladder was now firmly in sight, but as Bernard Venning, the Director Finance, was quite a bit younger than me the chance of getting there appeared to be slim. Jean and I continued our work with the Samaritans which still took up a great deal of our spare time. Our volunteers (listeners) were never short of clients, by this time we were a multiracial organisation but the majority of our callers were still white. For me personally, it was well known at Post Office Headquarters that I worked for the Samaritans and on several occasions I found myself offering support to members of staff. Our daughter Jennifer often remarked that she had to make an appointment to see her Mum and Dad.

It was beginning to become apparent that the political situation was becoming untenable as the troubles continued. The costs to the Defence Forces, both financially and in casualties, were escalating in the fight against the terrorists. In a bid to get the rest of the world to accept us the country was re-named Zimbabwe-Rhodesia and Bishop Muzorewa made Prime Minister. This attempt failed and it now became obvious that negotiations leading to black majority rule were inevitable. Despite the uncertainty of the political situation and the security problems life in general, both at work and at home, continued without any undue interruption. Jean and I couldn't have been happier. The 1970's for us as a family had been a time of great change. The children had now all left home and gone their separate ways. Gillian was married and now settled in England, Philip's future would be in South Africa, and as far as we knew Jennifer and her growing family would stay with us in Rhodesia.

In 1979 negotiations began at Lancaster House London for the transition to majority rule. The life that we had lived for the past thirty years could now be expected to change. How dramatically or painful the changes would be we had no idea. Jean and I felt that we would be able to accept them as they were vitally necessary.

A new Governor General, Lord Soames, was appointed, and the country was returned to colonial rule under the direct control of the UK. Arrangements

were begun to prepare for a general election and posters began to appear bearing the photograph of a bespectacled African "gentleman" who most of we Europeans had never heard of. We were soon to find out that this was in fact Robert Mugabe the leader of the ZANU (PF) party who had been in detention for some time. The freedom fighters (terrorists to us) were supposedly told to lay down their arms but whether they did or not was questionable. Most probably they disappeared out of sight back into the tribal areas. Polling stations were established and monitors were brought into the country to see that voting by the African population was not subject to any intimidation. British police were among the monitors. The general opinion was that intimidation of the rural voters was rife despite all the precautions taken.

Independence was celebrated on the 18th of April 1980 and Rhodesia became Zimbabwe.

ZIMBABWE AND THE EARLY YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

At this time my career in the Post and Telecommunications Corporation Finance Section appeared to me to be at the end of the road. I could see no further advancement as the next step up the ladder, the post of Director of Finance, was held by Bernard Venning who was much younger than me and beside that a fully qualified Chartered Accountant. There was no sign of him ever leaving. Any further promotion, therefore, seemed out of the question as the way ahead was well and truly blocked. Suddenly without any warning Bernard Venning resigned. It was a very great surprise to me and to the other members of the executive staff as his action was completely unexpected. I now found myself occupying his chair presumably until a replacement could be found.

The possibility of me filling the vacant post with no professional qualifications, albeit I had a great deal of experience, was out of the question. I took over the duties of which I was familiar having acted in the post many times. The task of filling the vacancy was in the hands of the Post and Telecommunications Board. So it was just a matter of getting on with the job to the best of my ability and awaiting the outcome of their decisions. One of my first tasks was to find out how my predecessor managed to maintain his air of importance and inscrutability. He did this by distancing himself from his staff, with the exception of those who worked closest to him. The remainder of the staff including the accounts section were he considered not his concern. Also from those who worked

directly with him he required that any reports produced, and there were many, were always submitted to him with five copies. I had often asked myself "what for?" I soon found out as on going through all the cupboards in his massive desk I came across hundreds of these copies. I filled at least six bin bags full to the top with them. And so I waited. I received a promotion to the Director of the Post Office Saving Bank on paper at least and in theory held both posts concurrently for several months. At least I benefited from a decent rise in salary. Even if I didn't get the position of Director Finance I was assured of a small branch somewhere at the top of the tree.

My patience paid off and early in 1981 I received a letter informing me that the Board had agreed to my appointment as "Director Finance". I had climbed as far as I could on the promotion ladder. It had taken a long time but I got there in the end. The next day I was visited by the in-house team responsible for refurbishment to give my office a makeover in accordance with my wishes. The result was very pleasing. I really did not know what I had done to deserve all this. After all I was still Pat Smith I didn't feel the least important, perhaps just a little proud with myself. Jean bought herself a new dress!

Everything was great. I had a good job, a wonderful wife, a superb family, a lovely house and garden with a large swimming pool and two cars in the driveway. What more could I have asked for. We were very happy.

During the time of Ian Smith's administration the sanctions imposed by Great Britain and other countries had little effect and the economy of Rhodesia had boomed. With our country now renamed Zimbabwe and accepted onto the world stage sanctions were removed. There was now in the beginning of the 1980's opportunity for new outside investment to help update the nation's infrastructure, especially in the Telecommunications branch of the Post Office. One of the first offers of help came from Norway who gave a grant for the development of telecommunications in the Victoria Falls area. Advice on financial matters and probable investment was sought by the Posts & Telecommunications Corporation from Warburg's, Merchant Bankers from the City of London who out sent their advisors. It was part of my work to assist them and liaise closely with them. Three of the advisors would fly out first class from the UK overnight spend the day and fly back the same evening, all very expensive. I sometimes took them back to 22, Birchley Avenue for dinner and a swim before their departure. It was quite noticeable that there were never any negotiations conducted

over the telephone which raised the question "Would their conversations be listened into by security?"

A start was made during this time to bring Africans into the top executive of the Corporation. I and two other senior executives had the task of interviewing likely candidates who if successful would understudy five top posts. My position of Director Finance was not included for some reason. It was a difficult task as most of the people applying had returned after taking refuge abroad during the Smith era. They attended armed with so called CV's supported with references which we had no way of ensuring whether or not they were genuine. Investigation in several suspicious cases revealed that they were not. One candidate said that he had worked for a bank in New York. He had in fact lived in the USA but not in New York and the bank did not exist.

All was calm and quiet on the domestic front with plenty of visits from Jennifer and Con and their young family. Our pleasant and comfortable life continued and we were all very happy. Good news from Gill and Ray but very little news from Philip which was not unusual.

Philip was now coming towards the end of his four year degree course at the University of Cape Town and was due to graduate at the end of 1980. Jean and I flew down from Salisbury to spend a ten day holiday at our favourite holiday resort Gordon's Bay a few miles outside Cape Town so that we could be ready to attend the graduation ceremony in December. We were met at the airport by Philip and his current girl friend Christine. After we had greeted one another very little was said. Christine, however, was quite excited for some reason and urged Philip to tell us the good news. Goaded on by a little prompting from her he told us that he had graduated with a First Class Honours Degree. We were of course very proud of him but he didn't seem to think that it was such a "Big Deal". After all he said that he still had a great deal to learn. The graduation ceremony was most impressive and it was a great thrill for both Jean and I to see him receive his degree. Soon afterwards we flew back to Salisbury to spend Christmas together with Jennifer and Con. Early in January Philip returned to Cape Town to take up his job with Roberts Construction Company who had sponsored him through university. We were not to see him then for some time.

We seem to be coping with the new independence but things did change, slowly. The Communist influence was becoming apparent; the media

came under Government control with party propaganda prominent. We weren't all that bothered but it was good now to be able to travel outside the city in safety. Jean and I paid a visit to Bob and Bunty Palmer, old friends from our Bulawayo days, who were now in Umtali (Mutuare). It was a very pleasant weekend chatting over old times. One noticeable change was the presence of the Chinese who had established a very large embassy in what was now Harare. I had, during the course of my work, contacts with members of the Government, some cordial and others not so. I was not used to being given orders which had to be obeyed without question and disliked the pressure that resulted from them.

Some most extraordinary events took place following the death of the Minister of Posts, an African who had been a prominent commander in the terrorist organisation. We members of the Post Office senior executive were called upon to attend at the hospital where he had died and to follow in procession behind the coffin to where it was to rest, prior to the funeral. On arriving we had to file past the lying in state and pay our respects. The coffin had a glass panel so that the face was visible. Afterwards we were greeted by the President Robert Mugabe who shook our hands.

On the day of the funeral we took our place, driving in a Post Office official car, in a long cortege which stretched through the city centre and drove slowly to a burial place called Heroes Acre which had been recently established several miles outside Harare. It was the beginning of the summer and was hot and very dusty at the burial site with large crowds of party supporters numbering several thousand. There was little, if any kind of shade and we were very uncomfortable in our suits. There were vendors of all sorts taking advantage of the situation by making a profit selling hot pies and ice-cream and other refreshments. The noise from the crowds and singing and dancing was unbearable. Funerals to us were a quiet and dignified affair. We decided, after about an hour, that we had had enough. So we made our way back to the car and to the cool of our offices in Lonrho House and a refreshing cup of tea. It was one funeral that I won't forget.

SOME EXCITING NEWS

Not long after this we received some exciting news from Gill and Ray. They were planning a six week holiday to come and visit us. They planned to arrive just before Christmas and stay into the New Year 1982. Jean thought it would be a good idea, after Christmas to go on a tour of

the country and then take a trip down to the South Coast of South Africa. Ray had said that he would like to go there. So Jean set to organising the tour, something that she really enjoyed doing.

It didn't take her too long to get cracking and she soon came up with a very comprehensive tour using the string of Government lodges situated in prominent tourist spots around the country. The lodges were thatched cottages with four bedrooms sleeping up to eight people. They were self catering, fully furnished, provided with linen and very clean, more importantly the rentals were reasonable. Jean and I knew our way around as we had visited most of the places quite often before the onset of the troubles which had made travelling in rural areas difficult.

As the months passed and December drew nearer, with the trip around the country all organised, thanks to Jean's hard work, we began to look forward to Gill and Ray's arrival. We were up very early that Sunday morning and met up with Jennifer and Con and their children, Dennis and Wendy and made our way to Harare airport to meet the British Airways flight. It had rained a little overnight and it was a beautiful warm and sunny morning. We did not have long to wait before their flight arrived and eagerly watched from the viewing balcony as the passengers disembarked from the plane. There they were, Ray already in his shorts. Our greetings over, we were soon on our way back to 22 Birchley Avenue. It was such a glorious morning that Jean decided we should have breakfast under a tree in the back garden overlooking the swimming pool. Ray said it was "Like being in Dallas".

The weekend over I returned to work whilst Jean took Gill and Ray to town, and to visit Jennifer at her home. In between times they lazed around the pool and swam and became acclimatized to the hot weather. Gill soon got used to being back home and driving around using Jean's car. In next to no time the days passed and before we knew it Christmas was with us. Christmas in mid-summer was certainly a new experience for Ray. In the meantime Philip had driven up from Cape Town on his motor bike to join us. It was customary for us to have our Christmas dinner with all the traditional trimmings on Christmas Eve. It would have been too hot during the day itself. So we men celebrated Christmas around the dining table in our summer shirts and shorts, with the ladies in their summer frocks. We had an ice-cream Christmas pudding; Ray hadn't seen one before but enjoyed it and said that it tasted just like the real thing. By the time we had finished it must have been getting on for midnight so we

came to the end of the day by opening or presents. We had a lazy day on Christmas day, Con and Jennifer came around with Wendy and Dennis. Con soon got the braai going whilst the rest of us swam and quenched our thirst with ice cold Castle lager.

THE TOUR AROUND ZIMBABWE

Inyanga/Lake Kyle/Wankie Game Reserve/Victoria Falls/ Matopos Hills/& Salisbury

The day after Boxing Day we set off on our trip around our lovely country which we still thought of as Rhodesia. We left 22 Birchley Avenue, Strathaven about 7. 30 in the morning and formed a small convoy of my car with Jean and Gill and Ray, followed by Con and Jennifer with their family and Philip on his motorbike having ridden up from Cape Town. We made our way slowly through the Harare in the early morning traffic to pick up the road to Umtali. The journey to Inyanga National Park would take us just over three hours with a break for coffee at Marandellas. We left the main road at the small town of Rusape and branched off to make our way up into the hills. The climb was gradual as we left but after twenty five miles or so steepened as we reached the outskirts of the National Park. The road was lined with eucalyptus trees which met overhead to form a green canopy shading us from the sun. The car became filled with a slight clean antiseptic smell coming from the trees. During the next few miles the scenery changed again as we drove through several miles of pine forest and then as we climbed further we came to rolling grass lands with clumps of trees and shrubs scattered over the landscape. There was little sign of habitation, not even a road sign to tell us where we were. I wound down the car window and was greeted by air that was fresh and cool. At last at the side of the road there appeared a sign almost hidden by the tall grass which pointed to our destination Udu. We turned left onto to a narrow gravel road for about fifteen miles which wound its way skirting some small hills. As we came to the top of a slight incline there below us shimmering in the bright sunlight was our destination Lake Udu with several thatched lodges spread along the lake shore. On arrival we soon sorted ourselves out. Our lodge slept ten people so there was plenty of room for everyone. We four men and the children went down to the water's edge to explore whilst the ladies organised a meal. The next few days were spent visiting some of the spectacular waterfalls in the area and other beauty spots.

It was time for us to move on to our next destination which was at Lake Kyle, which was situated a few miles from Fort Victoria. The journey took us from Udu down to Umtali where we met up with the road running south down the eastern side of the country. We travelled as far as Birchenough Bridge from where we made our way east across to Lake Kyle National and Wildlife Park. It was New Years Eve 1982. As dusk fell we got ready to celebrate the New Year. Con who was a past master at braais (barbecues) soon got busy preparing for our evening meal. Steaks were soon sizzling over the glowing embers, and our taste buds began to react from the delicious smell. We had been searching the area for dry wood to build a bonfire around which we planned to sit around during the evening. It was a beautiful evening warm with a slight breeze and not too many insect bothering us. With a beautiful star lit sky above us and bottles of cold lager and wine we welcomed in the New Year. 1982 had truly arrived.

We were up reasonably early on New Year's Day. Philip left us to travel the 1500 miles by motorbike back to his work in Cape Town, whilst we set off, after breakfast, for a spot of game viewing by the lake shore. As we approached the lake, led by Con in his car, we found the road completely blocked by at least ten massive rhinos lying in the road warming themselves on the tarmac after a cool night. It was a formidable sight. We were watching wondering what our next move should be: Con's car was in front of us, when suddenly his rear door opened and out jumped Dennis, still in his pyjamas. He obviously couldn't wait any longer to have a pee! As he performed he appeared quite unperturbed by the rhinos lying just a few yards in front of him. Con anxious to move on nudged the nearest of the beasts with his car. (Looking back this was not a very wise thing to do!) It did the trick and the one nearest to the car roused itself and slowly the rest got up and followed meandering off to graze peacefully at the side of the road whilst we carried on to the lake shore where there was a small herd of giraffe.

Our travels now took us to Fort Victoria and to Bulawayo where we had a short break and visited Con's Mother and the rest of his large family on the family farm. Everyone, yes everyone was there, Con's brothers and sisters and husbands and wives. It was rather overwhelming. We had a good welcome though. Refreshed by lots of tea and cake we then left Bulawayo and made our way up the Victoria Falls Road to the Wankie Game Reserve. Our lodge was in the Main Camp. We were not all together

this time Jennifer and Con and the children had a lodge of their own. We had a very pleasant few days, game viewing in the early mornings and in the late afternoons. There were plenty of animals, elephants, giraffe, baboons, and kudu to name but a few. No lions or leopards though. No rhinos either, we had seen enough of those at Lake Kyle! Our journey now took us through the Game Reserve to another camp in a remote area. The lodges here were situated on a high plateau and well protected from the wildlife by a wire fence. As we looked out all we could see surrounding the site were trees stretching for miles and miles in all directions. We felt very isolated. There was an eerie feeling about the whole place and you could hear nothing but the sound of birds. Everywhere in the camp was quiet, there were no other visitors. As the sun set it quickly became pitch black outside and lions could be heard calling from not too far away. Thank goodness for the strong fence surrounding us! We didn't sit around outside that evening, it felt much safer inside. The lighting was just oil lamps. No electricity here.

Early the next morning we carried on North through the park and reached our destination, the Victoria Falls. Our accommodation was outside the village in cottages not far from the banks of the Zambezi River. Jennifer and Con were our neighbours. Having settled in we made our way to view the Falls, one of the natural wonders of the world. It is difficult to adequately describe its majesty and the noise and turbulence caused as the water drops almost 350 feet from the mighty Zambezi over an escarpment which stretches for almost a mile and crashes into the chasm below causing a mist across the whole area. The evenings here were very warm and we sat outside to catch the cool breezes coming up from the river. Con had his torch with him which he would shine into the darkness sometimes catching the glint from the eyes of animals making their way down to the water. We found it quite exciting. Our stay lasted for three days and on the early evening of our last day we took a sunset cruise on the river, it was alive with hippos and we saw crocodiles and elephants on the nearby banks. Sadly our visit to the Victoria Falls came to an end.

We now made our way back to Bulawayo and from there took a short journey of 25 miles into the granite hills of the Matopos where at its heart was situated the Maleme dam. Here we had two lodges with magnificent views overlooking the water and the surrounding countryside. What a wonderful place to finish our tour of our beloved Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. It brought back fond memories of the time when we lived

in Bulawayo and the many times we had visited this place, getting up early in morning at weekends to drive out to Maleme for Jean to cook a breakfast of eggs and bacon beside the dam. How the children loved it especially clambering among the rocks whilst waiting for their meal.

We spent the last few days walking along the scenic pathways leading down to the dam and also visited a special place high up on a granite outcrop where Cecil Rhodes is buried. This site was often referred to as the "Westminster Abbey" of Rhodesia. Nearby is an exceptional memorial to those who perished along with their leader Alan Wilson in a battle with 7000 Matabele warriors in the late 1890's. It was known as the "Last Stand of the Shangani Patrol"

Our trip around Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) had almost come to an end and we made our final leg back to Salisbury (Harare): a long five hour journey.

After a few days rest we started once more on our travels. This time it was to be a much longer journey lasting two and a half days with two night stops. Our destination – the South Coast of Natal where we spent a week at the coastal resort of Amamzimtoti. Here we rented a flat overlooking the beach and the Indian Ocean. We explored this glorious coastline driving as far as Scottburgh. After a very pleasant relaxing week we made our way back home. The time had arrived for Gill and Ray to return to England after which for them, I am sure, was a very enjoyable holiday.

1982 OUR FINAL YEAR IN ZIMBABWE

The house seemed empty when we returned from the airport after seeing Gill and Ray off. We wondered how long it would be before we saw them again. Back then to our old routine which continued uninterrupted for the next few months. The real colours of the now established Mugabe regime began to show. It became obvious that the leanings were towards the East predominantly Communist China. Mugabe became increasingly autocratic, any criticisms of him or his government were not tolerated and anyone one who did so was dealt with harshly. In my dealings with Government Ministers it was a case of keeping quiet whatever my thoughts about their ideas. I just did not feel comfortable any more. Rumours abounded about happenings to white women in Harare such as being dragged out of their cars by officious police officers. Jean said that she felt apprehensive about driving into town on her own.

At this time I was working closely with the Postmaster-General on financial matters. Out of the blue a bombshell dropped, I can't remember

the exact date. I was having my shower before getting ready to go to the office in Lonrho House when Jean came rushing in to the bathroom saying "You'll never believe this but they have announced on the radio that Geoff Mills the Postmaster-General had been dismissed. "All was quiet when I arrived at work. I had expected turmoil. The office opposite mine had been empty for some time, and as I walked down the corridor I noticed that the door was ajar, curious as to why, I opened it and walked in. Sitting behind a desk and surrounded by files was Geoff Mills no longer looking his confident self and obviously very upset and lost. I said that I was sorry to hear the news. He didn't wish to talk so I left him and returned to my office. Later on in the day I learnt what had happened. It was believed that Geoff had probably criticized the Minister of Posts, a woman close to Mugabe, and had been overheard. The result was that he was dismissed and told to leave the country within three weeks or face the consequences which were possibly jail. For a man who had been born and brought up in the country and had lived here all his life with family connections going back several generations this must have been a shattering blow. He had been replaced immediately as Postmaster -General by Andre Silcox a member of the senior executive. This made me to consider seriously how secure was my future? With the head of the organisation being so vulnerable were we, the rest of senior staff, likely to find ourselves in the same position?

Jean and I discussed the situation at great length. I would be 58 in a few months' time and eligible to take early retirement in terms of the Lancaster House Independence Agreement. First of all before we could make any meaningful decision about possibly leaving I had to work out an estimate of what pension I could expect and also what lump sum I could anticipate as I would also be able to cash in one third of my pension entitlement. I now set about calculating my various options. There were many other questions to consider. Would we be able to live on any pension that I may receive? If we left the country where would we go to? What about our house? What capital if any would we be allowed to take with us? How would we feel leaving Jennifer and Con and their family behind?

I was able to assess my pension using a known formula and to calculate the value of it in the South African Rand and the British Pound. I had no idea, however, what the cost of living in those countries would be. The Zimbabwe Dollar at this time was fairly buoyant. The results of my calculations were favourable and showed that we should be reasonably

comfortable. I had the added advantage that I would be able to cash in a third of my Pension Fund and take it in cash with me to wherever I decided to settle. By now, with this information to hand we made up our minds that the time had come to make our first steps to leave. We owned a fairly new detached bungalow which we had had built standing in half an acre of ground. It had three double bedrooms with two bathrooms, a spacious lounge and dining room and a large modern kitchen. The garden was all developed with fruit trees, lawns and flower beds and in the back garden a large attractive swimming pool fully walled and with its own changing room. We had all we could have wished for after 34 very happy years of hard work. Now we had to sell it all! Selling the house was not straight forward. Government regulations were such that we could only ask for Z$ 25000, despite what it was actually worth, which was a great deal more than that. We had a mortgage of course but the capital that would be realised after the sale had to remain in the country.

We did not have to wait too long before we had a buyer. A very pleasant African couple, he was a teacher and she a nurse. I don't think that they could believe their luck in getting such a bargain. That however is not the end of the story. The couple were only able to get a mortgage on the condition that we invested our released capital with the lender, the Central African Building Society. There was just one small concession, however, the interest on our investment could be payable to us outside Zimbabwe. How very generous! Now came for me the most difficult part. The contract of sale had to be signed by me. A date and time was arranged. The Building Society was within walking distance from my office where I was to complete the proceedings. When I got to work I could think of nothing but the consequences of what I was about to do. The finality of it all became very real. This was the beginning of the end of the life we had known for the past 33 years. I said to myself "No this is not right, I just cannot go ahead with the signing". In desperation I rang Jean and told her what I thinking. She adopted a "Samaritan" attitude towards the problem and went on to counsel me for at least three quarters of an hour. I ended up by putting my signature to the contract of sale. That was by far the hardest thing that I had had to do for a long time. Thank you Jean for talking me around!

We now had to look for somewhere else to live. The PTC Pension Fund owned a block of town houses on the edge of town but they were far too small for our liking. Just around the corner, however, there was another

complex named "Montebello" which we liked the look of. We contacted the estate agent and went to view the accommodation. This was more like it. Down stairs there was a spacious lounge and dining area, a large kitchen and also a cloakroom. Upstairs there were three good sized bedrooms, one ensuite with a further bathroom and another bedroom in the loft area. This would suit us. At the front of the property, surrounded by a high wall with an entrance onto the street, was an enclosed courtyard. At the back were a garage and a carport. It was in comfortable walking distance of my office. This would suit us admirably and we agreed to rent the property. It wasn't long before we left 22, Birchley Avenue, Strathaven and moved into our new abode in "Montebello". It was then that the remainder of our decisions had to be made.

None of my staff or my immediate work colleagues mentioned anything to me about what I had been doing. I can only guess that, along with many other people in Zimbabwe at that time, they realised that Jean and I were making the first moves to leave. I was required to give three months notice to retire so I did so on the 1st of June. I had accrued several months leave so I applied for two months vacation which gave me a retiring date of the 30th November 1982. This was a big move to make as there would be no going back. I remember calling my secretary in to take a letter of my intention. The tears flowed when she heard what I was about to do. I don't know who was most upset her or me. She said it was one of the hardest letters she had had to type.

It was not long before I received the information regarding what pension I could expect and the lump sum which would result from the commutation of one third of my pension entitlement. These were in line with my calculations. The next question was "To where should we retire" Our first thoughts were Cape Town which we knew well and were very fond of the area. First of all we had to apply to the South African authorities for consent to live there. We knew that there should be very little difficulty, if any, of obtaining permission. It usually only took a matter of a few weeks. In the meantime, having a reasonable amount of cash, which we were only allowed to spend on travel, we decided to use it to go to England for two months and whilst there take coach tour of the Continent.

Our plans to leave had now been drawn up and on the 30th of September my service with the Post Office came to an end after almost 34 years. It was hard to believe. I said my good-byes to my staff with many of them expressing their sadness at me leaving. I was given a substantial cheque

as a farewell present with which I bought a handsome silver jug. Later that evening we held a party at the town house for the senior members of the executive staff including the new Postmaster General Andre Silcox. It was a great send off.

We spent our time during the next week in preparing for our flight to England. On arriving at the airport before our luggage was checked in it was subject to a stringent search by the African security staff. I am sure that they were searching for currency being smuggled out of the country. They were not at all particular as to how they repacked our belongings and I became very up-tight and was told by Jean to calm down because if I opened my mouth if could mean an end to our trip. I did just manage to calm down, but I am sure my face must have reflected my frustration. We travelled on a direct over night flight to London with Air Zimbabwe After an uneventful journey, with the new the African cabin crew being very smart and attentive. We arrived at Gatwick air terminal on the 8th of October to be met by Gill who took us back to her house in Pullar Road Boxmoor,Hemel Hempstead. It was good to be able to relax with her and Ray for the next few days away from the tensions that were mounting in Zimbabwe.

After a few days, having got used to being in England, it was now time to begin our European tour. Gill and Ray took us up to London to the Tower Bridge Hotel where we all had dinner before saying good bye. Before going to bed we were able to see floodlit Tower Bridge open and close which for us from Zimbabwe was thrilling. The next morning we boarded our coach. There were 48 of us as well as the driver and a tour manager. Our travelling companions were a cross section of people from around the world. Jean and I were the only ones with British Passports so it looked as if we were in for an interesting time. As the tour progressed we got to know many of our fellow travellers, people from Singapore, the Philippines, Australia, the USA, South Africa and South America. We became friendly with a couple, of a similar age to us, who were from Sydney. We became friends too with a mother and her daughter from Minneapolis who occupied seats behind us. At first we wondered for how long we would be able to put up with their constant chatter. As we approached Paris it was “My God” this and “My God that” as they looked out of the window. They turned out, however, to be very good company. Among the memorable places we visited over the ten days were Florence, Rome, Verona, Venice, Salzburg, Innsbruck, Munich and finally Amsterdam. We

arrived back in London with many happy memories and the enjoyment of visiting some of the famous places in Europe. Our favourite was Rome.

Back in England we spent time in Stowmarket with Jean's family and then back to Hemel Hempstead to be with Gill and Ray. They had rented a cottage in the Yorkshire Dales for several days. This was another interesting trip for us as neither of us had been to that part of the country. We visited Robin Hood's Bay and Whitby on the East coast as well as York, Richmond and Harrogate. On one memorable afternoon we called at a tea room in a remote village in the dales for afternoon tea. That was some meal, buttered crumpets, cream scones and large slices of mouth watering cake. We didn't need any supper that night, even after we had been for an energetic walk. We also crossed from Yorkshire into the Lake District and visited Lake Windermere. It was good to be with Gill and Ray and to enjoy their company. On returning to Hemel Hempstead we took the opportunity to look at properties to give us some idea as to what prices were like and what could be expected. We had no intention at that time of returning to live in England. Our sights were still set on settling in Cape Town. It was now time to return to Harare and to get ready for our move to pastures new. We arrived back on the 14th November

It was 6 weeks before Christmas and we had still received no reply to our application to settle in South Africa. It seemed rather curious as most people we knew had heard within a several weeks of applying. Philip rode up from Cape Town on his motorcycle to spend Christmas with us and Jennifer and Con and their family. It was good to see him and great of him to make the effort. Riding almost 2000 miles by motorbike must have required a great deal of stamina. There was of course much to discuss about our plans for the future and where we intended to settle. We were still set on going to Cape Town. With the funds we had available and with a regular pension we estimated that we could live there comfortably. Philip wasn't so sure considering the state of affairs in Zimbabwe appearing uncertain and the effect that any possible downturn in country's financial situation would have on my pension. He thought it better for us to go to England where at least we would have a safety net if things did go wrong in Zimbabwe and we found ourselves with little or no income. We heeded his advice and decided to make England our destination. It was a very painful decision to have to take. It meant leaving behind our friends of many years and Jennifer, Con, Dennis and Wendy and of course the land we had grown so much to love. When would we return if ever? On the

other hand we would not be on our own in England as we would be with Gill and Ray.

Christmas over we now had to start the process of arranging for our departure. First of all we had to visit a removal firm to organise our move. A little bit more was involved than just moving from one house to another in the same town. We had already given notice to leave our town house and would be staying with Jennifer and Con until we left. We were not allowed to take with us any new furniture and any furniture being taken had to be at least three years old. Before the removal firm could begin moving our belongings a government official came to examine the items we were taking and issued a certificate to say that everything met the authorised criteria. We had been prepared for this so we made sure that all was in order. On the morning that we moved a van arrived on the road outside. The small courtyard at the front of the house surrounded by a high wall had an entrance leading onto the pavement. All the furniture had to be carried out onto the pavement ready to be loaded. Pedestrians passing by stopped and looked some even asking if any of the items were for sale and admiring themselves in the mirrors. Whilst this was taking place boxes were being packed inside the house, crockery, glasses, household linen, cutlery, cooking utensils and the rest of our belongings. This was being done, not by ourselves, but by special packers, presumably for insurance purposes. It was a slow process as Jean was making a comprehensive list of the contents of each box and giving each box a number. Late into the afternoon all was finished and what was not being taken such as the stove, the refrigerator and the washing machine were whisked off to the saleroom. The doors of the van were closed and bolted. All those familiar things, some of which we had lived with for many years, had now gone. Here we were standing on the side of the road watching as the van disappeared around the corner, all we had left was two suitcases between us the contents of which we hoped would manage to last us for several weeks, and we were homeless!

We had no idea when we would see our possessions again. On the more positive side though we had the best part of £29 000 (a third of my pension pot) which would be transferred on the day we left Harare to await our arrival in Stowmarket. This would be enough to buy us a house and to set us up wherever we chose to put down our roots. We made our way from Montagu Avenue in Jean's blue Renault 4 to Jennifer's for supper at the end on an eventful and memorable day.

We spent the next few days visiting the removal firm to finalize the arrangements for the shipping of our belongings, and making sure that we had paid all our income tax up to date, and generally relaxing. We booked our flights with British Airways and seeing that we still had some cash to spare decided to fly in the comfort of Business Class. We had a horrible feeling of homelessness knowing that for the foreseeable future, we would be solely dependent on others for a roof over our heads.

FRIDAY THE 21ST JANUARY 1983

We needed to be at Harare air terminal by eight o'clock that evening to catch the British Airways flight to Heathrow. We had been staying with Jennifer and Con for the past week. After we had taken a final look around Con helped us to load our suitcases into the boot of his car. As we left we were all on tender hooks, hiding our feelings and emotions as best as we could by filling the silence with chatter. It was a glorious summer evening, warm and with a slight breeze. There had been a little rain early on and there was still a slight refreshing smell in the air as if everything had been newly washed. As we came down into the city along the Lomagundi Road we could see the flash of neon lights on the high rise buildings in the centre of the town. From now on there would be no more driving to the theatre after supper, or to the cinema, or to a concert in the city hall. No meeting up with friends for dinner at the Jameson Hotel, or to take up night duty at the Samaritans. The town was relatively quiet for a Friday evening with little traffic about as we made our way to the road leading to the airport. The children were a little subdued sitting cuddled up to Grandma on the back seat of the car. They were tired as they were not used to being up so late. On arrival we checked in our bags and stood around talking about nothing much just to pass the time. Then the hardest part of all saying good-bye. There were hugs and tears as we left and made our way to the departure lounge, looking over our shoulders to catch a last glimpse of Jennifer, Con, Dennis and Wendy as they stood waving to us. With our last few Zimbabwean dollars we bought a little copper chameleon to remind us of our life in this wonderful country. Our flight was called and as we made our way to the aircraft we turned and waved our last farewells to the family as they stood on the viewing balcony. And so began our journey back to England to begin a new chapter in our lives.

O LORD WHY ME?

This is an account of my life from its spiritual aspect and begins from my early life in the 1930's through to the present time 2014.

Maybe you will learn what makes me tick!

O LORD WHY ME?

Luke 17 v10:
So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty"

I write this on looking back and reflecting on what has taken place since I became a Lay Reader in November 1962 and asked myself the question "O Lord why me?" This is a question that I have kept asking myself since then, and still continue to do so.

God has always been part of my life ever since I was a child. I have remained a member of the Anglican Church since my baptism. As a child prayers, encouraged by my mother, were part of my bedtime ritual. My early associations with the Church were as a choir boy at St John's Church Boxmoor, Hemel Hempstead where I sang for six years or more. There I enjoyed the church music and became familiar with the services, the liturgy and most importantly the scriptures especially the psalms. I was not aware then of any spiritual element to my participation in Church life. It was just a very pleasant experience and something that I enjoyed being part of and from which I learnt the discipline of working as part of a team. This was an activity apart from school that I enjoyed and which was encouraged by my parents.

In July 1940, soon after the beginning of the war, I left school and started work at the Post Office in Hemel Hempstead. Church and my participation in worship had then to be put to one side. It was expected that my duties in the Post Office should take precedence over everything else and so my church life suffered. My army service began in February 1943 and I went to church if and when the occasion arose which was not very often. At the latter end of my army service, which was in India, I was stationed in Karachi. There my great friend Tom Law and I managed to go to church on most Sunday mornings at the Church of the Holy Trinity.

It was not until many years later after I had settled in Bulawayo Southern Rhodesia, married and become the father of three children that God called me in a way that I did not then understand. My local parish church, St Margaret of Scotland, North End in Bulawayo had a lively dramatic group. A friend of ours, whose father happened to a priest at the Bulawayo Pro-Cathedral, said that the group was looking for new members and would I be interested in joining. Jean, my wife, thought it would be good idea for me to have an outside interest and so I joined and took part in several

productions. The church then began to attract me. Robert Palmer, with whom I had become friendly, was a lay reader and a member of the drama group. He persuaded me to resume my lapsed membership of the church. I began to take my girls, Jennifer and Gillian, to Sunday school and I started to attend regular worship. The Church was in walking distance of our house which made things easy as we had no car at the time

I found myself getting involved in church affairs, taking part in services and as a result became to feel myself a member of the family at St Margaret's and once more doing things that I had enjoyed doing many years previously. I suppose there must have been some spiritual edge to all of this but I had no sense of calling or being directed by God in any way.

Bob Palmer had now by this time become a close friend. He and his wife lived not far from us, and Bunty and Jean had also become friendly. Bob, who worked in the telecommunications side of the Post Office, was moved to Gwelo (now Gweru) on promotion. Consequently his position as a Lay Reader became vacant. Soon after Bob had left I was approached by the Rector, Father Thelwall, who said that I had been chosen by the Church Council to fill the vacant position and would I accept? I had never wished or aspired to do anything like this and so I declined. I wasn't even prepared to consider it as I knew how doing so would affect my life and especially my family. It was a commitment that I felt that I could not accept. Regularly over the next few months I was approached and asked to reconsider. I had talks with Father Thelwall and we prayed about what I should do. At no time did I feel under any pressure. It then came back to me that several years previously I had, perhaps rather rashly, made a promise to God to serve him if he would save my son Philip's life.

Philip was about 10 months old at this time when his lungs collapsed and he was rushed into hospital. He recovered very well but a short while later the problem reoccurred, this time it was a great deal more serious and there was the possibility that if complications set in he might not recover. Although I found prayer very difficult, and I still do so to this day, I promised God that if it was His will that Philip should live I would offer myself in his service. Philip did recover, thank goodness, and I am afraid that the promise I made to God was somehow put to the back of my mind and forgotten. Sometime during the middle of 1962 after I think Father Thelwall had eased back a bit on his approaches to me the promise that I had made to God came back to me. He had not forgotten even if I had!

With great reluctance I felt that I had no option but to honour my promise to God and accept the call to serve Him as a Lay Reader. After all God had kept His part of the bargain. I secretly hoped though that I would soon be found wanting and that the Church Council would realize that I was not at all suited to the position and that family and work commitments would force me to give up. But God had other plans for me.

I had a good idea of what would be required of me church wise. I questioned the fact that I would be required to preach. What would I say? I posed this question to Father Thelwall whose reply was "You will have done your work if just one person in the congregation thinks about what you have said" This worried me a little and I asked "How I will know". Father Thelwall's reply was "You won't but God will" Father Thelwall also said wisely. " Don't talk about yourself remember people have come to Church to hear the word of God and not what Pat Smith has been doing during the week "

At Evensong on Sunday 4th November 1962 at St Margaret's Church Bulawayo I was admitted as a Reader (known as a Sub-Deacon in that part of the Anglican Communion) by the Bishop of Matabeleland the Rt. Rev Kenneth Skelton. There was to be no formal training, the Rector would guide me and be my mentor and the Holy Spirit would be with me. What more could I ask for? So reluctantly I set out on my journey. My path was not as difficult as I had expected it to be and the problems that I had foreseen did not materialise. No one in the congregation asked me to leave and I felt very comfortable doing what I had been called upon to do.

Preaching was not a problem, it was before the microphone became an essential aid, and I had no difficulty in speaking in public something that I had never done before. Was I being helped? I don't know. A test was to follow. Father Thelwall developed cataracts in both his eyes and in those days he was obliged to wait until he was practically blind before he was operated on for their removal. My task for several months, as Father Thelwall began to lose his sight, was to take those parts of the services, including weddings that a member of the laity was able to do, which on examination proved to be quite a great deal. In fact I became for a time his eyes. This increased my confidence a great deal and the uncertainty that I had at the beginning was no longer there. I was tested almost to the limit during 1963. He bravely carried on until his sight was almost gone taking services with me at his elbow. He would take the consecration at

the Eucharist whilst I would take the remainder, and so I found myself at the very heart of worship and in a very privileged position.

The difficulties that I thought would occur with my family life did not arise and with Jean's support I carried on with my commitments. They included attending Holy Communion at six o'clock one morning a week at a small chapel, St Katherine's, a few miles from home where I helped the celebrant. At the same chapel I took a service on Sunday mornings once a month. I enjoyed going there. The congregation was enthusiastic and consisted of poorer classes of whites and people of mixed race. I was always made very welcome. The area in which the chapel was situated consisted of a series of small holdings and often during services we were visited by hens looking for food. To accompany our hymns we had an old pedal organ whose blower had been converted to work by means of a vacuum cleaner operating in reverse – blowing instead of sucking. It worked well if the organist remembered to switch it on before the service. The cleaner was housed in the small vestry and was connected by a series of pipes and wires. The most memorable service I took there was a family service on Christmas morning 1962. The first time I had taken a service on my own. There wasn't a vacant seat in the chapel. Jean and the children and recent friends, Ray and Sylvia Switzer and their children came. I can still remember the joy of worship on that day. I became more and more involved in Church life over the next few years and there were family tensions when I said yes when I should have said no.

In 1966 I received promotion to a post in the Post Office Headquarters in the capital Salisbury (Harare). Now I thought this move away from St Margaret's would give me the opportunity to leave behind my ministry as a "reluctant" Lay Reader. But that was not to be the case! The very morning after we had arrived in Salisbury, following an over-night train journey, a strange thing happened; at least that is how it appeared to me. Jean and the children had gone shopping and I was seeing to the unloading of our furniture and placing it in the house when a knock came at the front door. Standing on the doorstep was a priest dressed in his cassock. He asked if I was Pat Smith a Lay Reader from Bulawayo. Yes I replied. He introduced himself and said he was the Parish Priest Peter Hall and would I be able to assist him at St Peter's, Mabelreign, the local parish church, on Sunday morning (it was Friday). I declined saying I would contact him when I had settled down. I was intrigued to know how he had found me, how did he know about me and where I had come from? No one in Bulawayo

knew our new address in Salisbury. The Rector never disclosed where he had received the information from. He was a very austere high Anglican and stuck very much to the rules. We had arrived during October and as Christmas drew near I was expecting possibly a service of nine lessons and carols. I was told "Carols are not appropriate before Christmas" (after Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve - yes). I thought to myself this church and priest are not for me, even though I am high Anglican myself. I did help him in small ways and Jean and I, with the help of a very ancient typewriter and a very old duplicating machine, started a newsletter/ magazine for the parish. Peter Hall showed little or no interest in what we were doing. Eventually someone else took up the idea and it became a monthly newsletter entitled "The Key"

Just after Christmas he left, where he went to I never knew. It was all a big surprise to the congregation. I was the only active Reader in the parish (there was one other but he was the local GP and had very little spare time for anything but his work) and so it fell to me and the Churchwardens to keep the show going. The Bishop of Mashonaland Paul Burroughs gave us his support and so once more I found myself, whether I liked it or not, at the centre of parish affairs. The interregnum lasted for two years before a new priest his wife and baby daughter arrived from England. David Rymer was a young curate who had not run a parish before and needed guidance. I went to meet him the evening after his arrival; the Rectory, a fairly new house, was in the grounds of the Church. When I arrived his wife and baby daughter were both unwell and David was sitting there lonely and forlorn. The first thing I did, with his help, was to do the washing up. That was the beginning of a close friendship which lasted until he returned to England several years later. David and I got on very well but he was inclined to be led by stronger members of the Parish. After a year or so his wife, Rosemary, had become involved in parish life. As she was musical she played the organ (rather small but it did the trick) and formed a choir of which Jennifer my elder daughter became a member, and also helped with the Sunday school. One rather forceful lady, I will call her Mary, decided that she wanted to become a Lay Reader. The Church in Rhodesia hadn't progressed so far and appointing women as Readers was still to be resolved. By fair means or foul she had her way and soon had David obeying her orders. This may all sound very uncharitable but her intentions, good as they may have been, led to some rather uncomfortable situations.

As in similar circumstances if you persevere and try hard the problems, with God's help, sort themselves out. In time Mary became a good friend both to myself and Jean and needed our support when her marriage began to crumble. Mary would come with me to an Old Peoples' home where I took a service once a month and she would play the piano.

I found myself needing to spread the "Good News" beyond the confines of the Parish Church. But how I wondered?

In 1973 Jean and I with Philip and Gill visited England to attend my parents' Golden Wedding celebration In Hemel Hempstead. Mother and Father had a long association with St John's Church in Boxmoor where they gave thanks for their marriage at a communion service on Saturday the 19th May; fifty years to the day since they were married there. It was a great occasion. I was privileged to preach at sung Eucharist on the Sunday following. My thoughts, naturally, went back to my early years as a choirboy there.

In 1973 on returning to Salisbury after our trip to England I started to attend lunchtime communion at the Anglican Cathedral which was opposite Lonrho House the building in which I was working. Towards the end of the year there was a notice displayed advertising the visit of Chad Varah the founder of Samaritans. He was to talk about his work in the Cathedral Hall. As it was to be in the late afternoon (5 o'clock) I decided to go after work and found myself signing up to attend a selection course with the local branch of Samaritans. The Director of the branch was an Anglican priest as was often the case in those days. I was duly accepted as a new recruit, and was due to start my duties in early 1974 but had to delay for a short while as I needed to have a malignant mole removed from my back. So began my time as a Samaritan.

Soon afterwards David Rymer left St Peter's Mabelreign to return to England. Peter Black a local person became the new Rector. I found him a very difficult person to work with and so concentrated on Samaritans and continued to worship on weekdays at the Cathedral. I missed David very much as we had worked so well together. I did not resign as a Reader, however, but became much less involved in Church Affairs.

I found my work with Samaritans very worthwhile. I felt that at last I was putting my Christian faith into practice in a positive way helping those whose lives were often at breaking point. I did not know with whom I was dealing; they were just a voice at the end of the phone seeking help

and reassurance. In some cases I did meet clients face to face but as a friend, someone for them to talk to, nothing more. I truly felt that in my work with Samaritans I was being guided by the Holy Spirit in all I did, something that I had found lacking in all my church work. A few years after I had begun my involvement with Samaritans Jean joined me and from then onwards we devoted the majority of our spare time to the cause not only as listeners but in training, administrative and committee work up until the time that we left the new Zimbabwe to return to England in January 1983.

We bought a house and settled in Stowmarket. The Parish Church of St Peter and St Mary was within walking distance and so I presented myself to the Vicar eager this time to take up my ministry as a Reader, not knowing how different it would be from Zimbabwe. I was made very welcome and after a reference from David Rymer, who was now a Vicar in London, I was given permission to resume my work. In due course I was admitted by the Bishop at a service in the cathedral at Bury St Edmunds. Tragically the Vicar of Stowmarket, Peter Moore, died suddenly before I took up my post and I didn't get to know him. In due course a new incumbent was appointed, Jeremy Harrold. Jeremy was very reserved but gradually over time I got to know him well and it was a pleasure to work with him.

The next twenty years of my ministry as a Reader was the most productive and enjoyable of the whole of my forty years. Besides my work in the Parish Church I found myself used to a much greater extent in the Stowmarket Deanery and I grew to know many of the village congregations well. From 1983 for the next ten years or so many of the parishes were without clergy. I was called upon to perform baptisms and take communion to the congregations in what was known as "Extended Communion". The elements were consecrated at an earlier service at the parish church and then distributed at a later service in a village church, which I as a Reader often conducted. If it had not been for this arrangement many congregations would not have been able to receive the Sacrament on a regular basis. I felt very privileged to be permitted to do this and felt very close to the centre of my faith. There was a great element of trust and commitment involved in this work but I still continued to question "Why me Lord?"

In 1991 the diocese embarked upon a programme to help increase the number of clergy by the local training of members of congregations to

become Ordained Local Ministers (Non-stipendiary Ministers). At St Peter's & St Mary's this started by the forming of a meeting, called by the Vicar Jeremy Harrold, of those who felt called to become OLMs and others who were involved in worship which included myself. My duties at the time were many and varied and I seriously considered whether this was the path for me. After much deliberation I decided against going ahead with the training which was scheduled to last for the next three years ending in 1994. By then I would have reached the age of seventy and I felt that I did not want to take on any additional responsibility at that time in my life. So I decided to withdraw from the course.

Jeremy Harrold and I had by now become good friends. To relieve some of the pressure on him (by this time he had become the Rural Dean) I agreed to take over and sort out his filing which was very badly in need of some kind of re-organisation. The outcome was the establishment of a Parish Office in the church vestry. At first there was a small amount of opposition, mainly because of the need to finance the project. I shared the manning of the office with two other willing helpers. The office proved successful in establishing an administrative centre for the parish which was easily accessible, as well as maintaining a necessary presence in the church each morning throughout the week. It laid the foundation for what has now become an indispensable part of parish life.

By this time God had certainly used me in many ways more than I had ever considered possible when I set out on my spiritual pilgrimage which I had been reluctant to undertake at the beginning of my Reader ministry in 1962.

In 1999 Jeremy Harrold left the parish on retirement and the new millennium started with the appointment of a new incumbent, Trevor Jones. From the outset I began to feel uncomfortable with his method of approach and the fact that he curtailed many of my parish duties. My presence in the office did not suit his method of working. I had become to be at the centre of the day to day running of the parish. As far as my Reader ministry was concerned I was more involved in the Deanery than in St Peter's. Finally matters came to a head and I told him that I could no longer work with him which was obviously what he wanted. Much to my chagrin I left the parish and after six months of anguish I found comfort in worship at St John's Needham Market along with others who had left Stowmarket. I was transferred as a Reader to the Bosmere Deanery but did not become involved. After the debacle concerning Trevor Jones and the

appointment of Michael Eden as the new incumbent I returned to St Peter's after having retired from my work as a Reader. God though had another plan for me through a ministry away from the church environment. It was to become a full time commitment for a way in which I could never have envisaged. In late 2004 Jean was diagnosed as having Alzheimer's disease. The condition gradually became worse over the next three years and she became entirely dependent on me. Through the kindness of friends I was able, at odd times, to leave her. After many years of happy marriage the vows that I took before God in 1949 to support Jean in "Sickness and in Health" became a reality. I believe that I was only able to cope and remain positive during those sad times through the continued comfort of God's Holy Spirit. It remained with me in all those times of stress without me consciously seeking its grace. It still continues to do so in a quiet and unobtrusive way. My journey as a Reader began with a request to God for healing and ended, away from the confines of the church, with the healing of Jean's broken mind as she slipped away to be with Him.

My path over those many years has been one of reluctant obedience to the call given to me. The strength and the power of the love of Jesus has been my constant companion, though I have not always acknowledged this. My faith has often wavered, my prayers have been inconsistent and sometimes absent but for all this I have never been abandoned despite my unworthiness.

I am still quietly being called to serve the Lord in smaller ways though now with a willing heart!

PAT SMITH

July 2009

St Margaret's foundation stone, Bulawayo, 1960

Comments added on 4 August 2011 after reading the book "The Road Less Travelled" by M Scott Peck.

I read this with great enthusiasm.

The book attempts to chart our spiritual progress as we proceed on life's journey. Peck discusses how we may or may not accept the influence of what he calls "Grace. " As a Christian I identify it as God's Holy Spirit which I believe is within us all. The Holy Spirit comes to us as a gift from God. It is as a light that shines in all of us, if we will let it do so. The Spirit operates as and when it will beyond our control and often when we are unaware of its presence. Its power may lead us into situations where we would not normally go and to take decisions that are alien to us.

On looking back on my own spiritual pilgrimage it is plain for me to see where I have been led by the Spirit, despite my unwillingness to follow, and despite my resistance to obey. All the many fears that I had about my Reader Ministry in the early days and the affects I was frightened it could have on my family life and my marriage did not materialize. The grace of Holy Spirit supported not only me but those closest to me. It has led me to do things in God's name that I would never have dreamed of.

Throughout Jean's illness the Spirit was my constant companion, though I was not fully aware of its comforting presence at the time. It is still continuing to have an influence on my life in some way which I do not fully understand.

I beg to ask the question – "Why Lord?"

4 August 2011

This is a poem written after I had taken a Service at Old Newton on the Sunday after Easter, possibly in the early 1990's

ST MARY'S OLD NEWTON
THE SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

The sacred smells from centuries of worship.
The pungency of fading Easter lilies

The sight of spring sunshine beaming through the East window.
A kaleidoscope of colour on the Chancel floor.

The smooth touch of ancient oak worn through constant prayer.

The sound of organ, the comforting words of favourite hymns

The familiar taste of bread, the rich taste of wine. The Body of Christ broken for you. The blood of Christ shed for you.

"Peace be unto you; as my Father hath sent me, even I send you".

Visit to Stowmarket 1961