

I Chapter 7

Africa Revisited

Que sera sera. What ever will be will be, as Doris Day would for ever croon compellingly, ‘mixing memory and desire’ for the unwary listener, his having then to deal with a raft of uncertainties. He then might ask himself, Will I be this or will I have that not to mention a range of what ifs to follow that. The first answer that would occur to him is that he cannot but philosophically accept whatever it may be that future’s chancy dice throws for him. The future is not ours to see *Que sera sera*, enough said. That is not to say that we cannot have a goal in life and aspire for a future that sees our hopes fulfilled. ‘A man’s reach should exceed his grasp or what’s a heaven for?’ asks the poet who was, for better or for worse, an incurable optimist. God’s in His heaven and all’s right with the world! That may well be so, but then the question is can you reckon without the personal demons that might trip you up? You may, for instance, be given to letting things hang fire, only to see receding opportunities cocking a snook at you. As the Spanish would say, “*Por la calle despues, se va a la casa de nunca.*” By the street of the by and by, one arrives at the house of never”. Or it may be, there are your DNA parameters that limit your reach. There are the high-flyers and then there are the low-flyers. From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs as Marx mischievously rationalises the pesky variables in a so-called society of equals. You see, Marxists may want to redistribute material wealth, but cannot redistribute intellectual potential to provide a level playing field to the masses. That’s cold comfort for those ordinary mortals who would have wished to soar, but could not for one reason or another.

So, with your clipped wings that keep you earthbound, you join the general gaggle of supplicants to peck about for the leavings that lie around. Sometimes you are pleasantly surprised at what you have snapped up, but, quite often, not quite as pleasantly as you would have wished. Either way, you cannot make do without the ‘leftovers’ that you have managed to pick up in that relentless push and shove for survival. Can you?

Thus it was that I was compelled yet again to accept an opening elsewhere after certain developments at school had upset the rhythm of our lives in Lovedale. A break with the past is never easy, especially after you have put down roots somewhere and the place has already grown on you, but it was just as well.

Notwithstanding this uprooting, our replanting ourselves in Africa -this time in Zambia- was to help me reap a richer harvest than I had until that time hoped for either professionally or materially. And also, we were fortunate that it happened before the neo-colonialists had made serious inroads into Zambia’s economic independence.

Our earlier stint in Africa in the mid 50’s and early 60’s had seen the continent passing through a period of political unrest and upheaval. Equally, it saw the excitement that accompanied the success of its struggle for independence especially in Anglophone Africa, both East and West. Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah was the first to become independent. That was in 1957 and, soon followed Nigeria under Aboobacker Tafaawa

Belewa. We had the rare good fortune to have a veritable ringside view of how Julius Kambarage Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta and Milton Obote fought and won *Uhuru* or independence for the people of British East Africa. It did not come easily; no, not by a long stretch. It was often won at great cost in precious human lives. We know how Dedaan Kimathi's Mau Mau uprising was put down ruthlessly. The rest is now history. The great Jomo himself had been incarcerated for a long time. Enormous sacrifices had to be made by the indigenous people of an older generation. Yet, to the new generation of Africans 'bliss was it to be alive' and 'to be young, very heaven' for they had a whole new future to look forward to.

At midnight on that eventful day in 1961, I had the rare privilege of sharing that magical moment with the multitude that had gathered there to witness Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, president of the Tanganyika African National Union, proudly hoisting the flag of independent Tanganyika at the Uhuru Stadium in Dar es Salaam and exhorting his people to *Umoja* or Unity. The people of Tanganyika had come a long way when they lustily intoned their national anthem, *Mungu Ibariki Afrika* (God bless Africa) at that historic moment. How, later on, Tanganyika became Tanzania when the island of Zanzibar agreed to a merger with mainland Tanganyika is also now history. Earlier, the people of Zanzibar had gained their freedom from their autocratic Sultan owing, largely, to the struggle for independence of the Afro-Shirazi Party and its leader Abeid Karume.

In an earlier era, the people of Tanganyika had lived through harder times under the despotic Germans. They were pitiless colonial masters who treated the colonised like cattle. According to old timers who had straddled both eras, the indigenous people had literally lived through constant fear of being horsewhipped by their German 'herders' on horseback even for the most inconsequential infringements of their laws, which were at best only arbitrary. Hanging in public was not infrequent as an example of retributive justice. This was not as though they were upholding the rule of law, such as it was, but more as though they were re-enacting the law of the jungle. After German East Afrika was ceded to the British as a trust territory by the League of Nations, life became less harsh for the people. Yet, it was a life of regimentation for them and they were also just as happy to be rid of British rule when they did, and not a moment too soon. And Nyerere became its first president.

The 'wind of change' that would blow across Africa as Harold Macmillan had predicted, however, was yet to gather full force. The political ferment that we later witnessed in the Africa of the 70's and 80's, was no different in its intensity, but the arena had by then largely shifted to the colonies in Central and Southern Africa. Kaunda's Zambia had already wrested her independence from the colonial powers well over seven years before we reached that country early in 1972. The people were enjoying a period of relative peace and prosperity that they had not known before. It may well be, Sir Seretse Khama of Bechuanaland, later named Botswana, and Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda of Nyasaland, later named Malawi, had already beaten Kenneth Kaunda to the post in the race for independence. I am not sure if my rusty memory would bear me out, either way. And I am not very good at trawling the Internet.

It took a few years more before Zimbabwe gained its independence and the cost in human lives and resources for the struggle was borne not only by the people of Southern

Rhodesia but by neighbouring countries as well. South Africa was yet to win independence and Nelson Mandela was still marking time on Robben Island. Then there was the unfinished business of the Portuguese colonies. Augustinho Neto of Angola and Samora Machel of Mozambique were still leading the struggle for independence. And, last but not the least, there was Namibia. In due course, they also were to win their freedom.

In spite of all the happiness that freedom has brought and notwithstanding the potential wealth of Africa's famed natural resources, all has not been well in many countries there. The people have been beset by a plethora of problems, not the least of which has been the corrupt, ruthless and megalomaniacal leaders they have been saddled with. These despotic leaders have without exception shown a proclivity towards clinging on to power by whatever means at their disposal. Idi Amin, Jean Bedel Bokassa, Mobutu Sese Seko, Sani Abacha, and the list goes on. Thankfully, most of them have had their comeuppance. That we haven't seen off all of them, however, is indeed a sobering thought. You only have to think of Robert Mugabe and how from the outset he has incrementally arrogated to himself absolute power by sidelining younger, more capable aspirants to know how the likes of Mugabe continue to be a festering sore on the body politic of Africa.

In refreshing contrast, the leaders like Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Leopold Senghor – he of the *negritude* fame- erstwhile President of the Ivory Coast and Nelson Mandela of South Africa were to stand apart in a class of their own as selfless leaders *par excellence*. And, Mandela stood towering above the rest. They, each of them, strode their world like a colossus. They groomed their successors and when the time came, made way for them gladly. Their people may have been critical of their acts of commission or omission when they were in power, and that was as it should be for that was their democratic prerogative, but, regardless, the people recognised their integrity and selflessness and to this day continue to revere their memory.

Joaquim Chissano the former president of Mozambique is a more recent version of such a leader. On Monday, 22 October 2007, at a ceremony in London's City Hall, it was announced that the inaugural prize to reward African leaders for good governance and for leaving office voluntarily had gone to Chissano. Interestingly, even as the announcement was being made, Chissano was unreachable as he was in a remote part of northern Uganda trying to mediate between the government and the God's Army rebels. And it was his 68th birthday! On being told of what he was about, Kofi Annan the former UN Secretary General, is said to have exclaimed, 'What a way to spend a birthday!'

Incidentally, the man behind the US\$ 5 million award -to be paid over 10 years, plus \$200,000 a year for life- is Mo Ibrahim, a rags-to-riches, London-based Egyptian billionaire, whose eponymous foundation has instituted the African Leadership Prize to add '...a new chapter to his remarkable story, not because of the millions he has made but for what he has decided to give away' as London's Evening Standard reported three days later.

When asked why he was giving away his money, he said, 'I'm a Nubian. In my culture, it is shameful that I should eat well while my neighbour is starving. In Africa, there is no safety net, so people rely on the extended family. I came from nil; I know what it is to

have nothing. Besides, how many millions does a man need to live on...?’ I believe that in the years to come other great humanists of Africa would be rewarded for their past services to the continent. And, that other great Africans would reveal themselves to be humanists like Mo Ibrahim. Cometh the hour, cometh the man.

Not the least of that august pantheon is Kenneth Kaunda the first president of Zambia. The mention of Zambia at once brings to mind the familiar sight of Kaunda waving his trademark handkerchief, dazzling white as always. So does his constant refrain of ‘One Zambia One Nation’ even as he would address his people on the virtues of humanism in all fields of human endeavour. His full-throated rendering –he is a great baritone- of the Zambian National Anthem, ‘*Tiyende Pamodzi*’ still resonates whenever I think of Zambia. That he could meld the various tribes as diverse as the Lozis of Barotseland, the Bembas of the Northern Province, the Llambas of the Copperbelt Province, and the Tumbukas of the Eastern Province, to name but a few, is a tribute to the great vision of a man whose continual reminder of the oneness of Zambia had prepared his people to cut across tribal barriers and find common ground as a unified nation. But this was not achieved without initial hiccups.

At the very start, the fledgling nation of Zambia had had its problems in the form of a revolt led by a self-proclaimed prophetess. That was in the person of a woman called Alice Lenshina. With her as a spiritual leader, a horde of misguided people challenged the Zambian establishment and rose in insurrection. Believe it or not, her followers had been led to think that if they covered themselves with their own faeces they would be able to dodge army bullets! As one might have guessed, the foulness of faeces alone could not have deflected bullets. Except for this initial burp, it must be said, to the great credit of Zambians, that their nation has not suffered anything remotely like the internecine conflicts that some countries in Africa are chronically plagued with.

What was rather difficult to content with, however, was the ingrained idea in the Zambian psyche that work was something that others did, but which was more than might be expected of them. There is this proverb of the Tonga tribe that pretty much sums up this attitude: ‘Sometimes people would do anything to make money; they would even work!’ It took Kaunda, indeed with the full backing of the cadre-based United National Independence Party, a long time to disabuse the people of this easygoing outlook on life and to instil into them the importance of work for survival in a competitive world. As to whether he was entirely successful, the jury is still out.

I have had the good fortune to meet in person the great man himself twice. The first occasion was a formal one at the State House on Independence Avenue in Lusaka when I had accompanied Bishop Thomas Mar Athanasius of the Mar Thoma Church of India for an audience with the president. I was with the UN at that time. The meeting lasted no more than half an hour. On our arrival, we were ushered into an anteroom to wait for the president. At the appointed time, the president walked in with a warm smile on his face. He was elegantly turned out in his well-tailored linen safari suit. A silk cravat was neatly wound round his neck. His wrist watch was on his right hand and a copper bangle adorned his left. And of course, the by-then-familiar white handkerchief was loosely held between his third and fourth finger of his left hand. His firm handshake bespoke a strong character. The ensuing exchange was mostly about the relations between India and

Zambia. At the end of it he rose, shook hands with us and bid us goodbye. That was in 1978 if my memory serves me right.

The second was an informal affair at our friend Mohan Koshy's place at Esher in Surrey, a full quarter of a century later. He was in transit on his way back to Zambia. Dunstan, his constant companion and Man Friday was with him. He spent several hours with us reminiscing about Zambia. For an octogenarian, he appeared very well preserved, quite laidback and surprisingly energetic. Evidently, he follows a strict regimen. We were amazed when he enthusiastically ventured to knock a football around the front yard with Johan, Mohan's eleven-year-old son. Even in retirement, he is frequently on the move traversing the world on lecture tours.

Zambia is a landlocked country that depends on its neighbours to offer her a lifeline, an umbilical cord so to speak, that connects her to the outside world for sustenance. The Chinese-built Tanzam Railway from Dar-es-Salaam to Kapiri Mposhi is a case in point. Along with that, you think too of that bountiful gift of nature and the backbone of her economy, copper no less. You also think of the other things that Zambia is blessed with. Its great climate, for one. It is a veritable Shangri-La! Besides, the fertility of its soil holds out great possibilities for the tillers of the soil. To this day Zambia has not suffered pangs of starvation unlike many an African country such as Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan.

And then you think of that great gift of nature that Zambia is endowed with, the mighty river Zambezi with its awe-inspiring waterfalls, so striking at first sight as to beggar all description, which the locals had always called 'Mosi-o-Tunya' or 'the Smoke that Thunders', mixing their metaphors with such remarkable felicity. And then David Livingstone had to go and name it rather unimaginatively after Victoria, his rather mousy queen whose appearance was certainly not the most inspiring! And this, after he is reputed to have gushed as soon as he set eyes upon the falls that it was 'lovely enough to arrest the gaze of angels!' That his compatriot colonisers, who came later, in their turn, named the area surrounding the falls after him was only to be expected. That the Zambians, however, have not stooped to changing the name of the place is a tribute to their sense of history, not to say their broadmindedness in keeping alive the memory of Livingstone who had done so much for the emancipation of the people of Africa.

Where was I? Yes, at the break with the past. In the course of our professional lives, we are often forced to change tack when the winds are not favourable and all is not what it should be. As you may recall, that was what had happened to me back in 1955 when Ammu was expecting our first son Bobby, and we would soon have a new mouth to feed. On my meagre earnings at St. Thomas College, Kozhencherry, I could hardly have hoped to put food on the table after starting a family. Thus it was that I had eagerly taken up a teaching position in erstwhile Tanganyika and moved to East Africa. But that move had made matters only marginally better, initially. It was not until 1962 that the Ministry of Education thought it fit to promote me to Education Officer Grade 1A with its enhanced benefits. For the first time in my professional career I had reason to feel that my commitment to my work was being adequately compensated by the powers that be.

Then in the September of 1964, there was another change of scene for me, this time to London for the purpose of honing my skills in the teaching of English Language. At the

same time, quite opportunely as it turned out, Ammu went back to India to be trained as a teacher. At the close of the '64-'65 academic year corresponding to July 1965, I was to join Ammu for a short spell in India and then together return to East Africa. The Aga Khan School authorities were anxious to have me back in harness without undue delay.

But then, we were soon overtaken by events we had not bargained for. In the August of 1965 to be precise, we were compelled to change course again, but this time for a different reason. It was our doubts about the level of care that our sons, Bobby and Bonny, had been receiving at their boarding school back in India that compelled me to give up our laidback life in Africa and join the Lawrence School at Lovedale in Ooty for a teaching job that was providentially on offer then. Truth to tell the position in Lovedale was much less remunerative than the one in Africa, but, of course, it was to prove professionally infinitely more rewarding in more ways than one. It was also considerably more reassuring as far as our expectations for the future of our children were concerned, for they had automatically found places in that school by virtue of my appointment.

Towards the end of 1971, circumstances once again conspired to upset the even tenor of our life, this time in Lovedale, which we had grown so used to over the little more than six years that had gone by since the August of 1965. What materialised was that the headship of the school was soon to fall vacant, so applications for the post had been called for and prospective candidates short-listed. My name found a place in that list, I was interviewed, but that was as far as it went. A colleague who was senior to me, and whose credentials were no doubt impeccable, was offered the post. But my own self-image, call it ego if you like, had taken a knock and would not quite let me come to terms with the prospect of having to continue working with him. Besides, I had no particular fondness for the man. Altruism could only go so far. Yet, realistically, I could not let go of the 'bird in hand' without finding some worth more than that.

So, mentally I began casting my net wider as a way out of this dilemma. My close friends, who were privy to my state of mind, tactfully poured light scorn over any knee-jerk reaction that I might be contemplating. The outgoing headmaster, K. I. Thomas, who was also *au fait* with the quandary in which I had found myself, suggested a way out and asked me to apply for the Headship of the Punjab Public School at Nabha, which was on offer even as those self-diminishing thoughts were lashing about in my head. I needed no further prompting to apply, I was called up for the customary interview and I came away feeling quite sure that I had made an impression on the school governors. As I was waiting for the official letter of appointment, which did eventually arrive, my serendipity had another surprise for me to further soothe my sorely tested ego.

Shortly after I had been interviewed for the Nabha vacancy, P. A. George, AKA Thampy, a friend of ours from our Tanganyika days had contacted me and asked me if I would be interested in a teaching position in Zambia, where he was at that time working as the Chief Supplies Officer for the Zambian Railways based in Kabwe. I did not have to think twice to say that I was. Going back to that fascinating continent was encouragement enough. Thampy's contacts in Zambia had opened the way for us. And soon, an offer was forthcoming from Zambia. The school authorities at Nabha were indeed waiting to hear from me.

Nothing could have been more fortuitous than that, for it gave me another option to mull over. That the Zambia package also included a teaching position for Ammu was an additional incentive. Besides, Bobby was sixteen, pushing seventeen, and Bonny, snapping at his heels. I realised that we would soon have to come up with large sums of money to send them to college. And as for our daughter Bina, who at that time was only three and a half years old, we realised it wouldn't be long before she would also appear on the radar and be a part of the financial equation, to mix metaphors blithely.

Leaving Bobby and Bonny behind at Lovedale, Ammu, Bina and I, left Cochin on the 7th of January 1972 by an Indian Airlines flight bound for Bombay. Having spent the night there, we took an Air India flight to Nairobi on the morning of 8th January. We had a day's stopover in Nairobi. My dad's cousin Kunjaappichaayan and his wife Kunjoonjamma Kochamma met us at our hotel and took us out on a round of visits to their friends in Nairobi. I remember our visiting some expatriate Malayalee friends of theirs including the widow of the late Mr. Philipose, who had been India's Trade Commissioner to Kenya until his untimely death not long before. And on the trot we called on another widow, Mariamma, wife of the late Mr. Mathen whom we had known back in Dar es Salaam. We also took in a bit of shopping. Late next evening we reached Lusaka by a Zambia Airways flight.

It was Sunday the 9th of January. Thampy and his wife Jolly were waiting at the airport to receive us. So was Brother Marcel the principal of St. Paul's Secondary School of Mulungushi, the school where both Ammu and I had been offered teaching positions. After the initial introductions, Brother Marcel left us in the care of Thampy and Jolly on the understanding that they would drop us off at Mulungushi in a day or two. We accompanied them to Kabwe. At a fair lick, Kabwe is a good two hours' drive from Lusaka by road. By the time we reached Thampy's place it was well past midnight and without further ado, we went straight to bed.

Jetlag notwithstanding, we ventured forth the next morning to go shopping for the basic things that we would need to get off to a start and hopefully adapt quickly to the new milieu that we had transplanted ourselves to. Wherever in the high street of Kabwe we went shop crawling, we found the shop shelves bursting with the kind of stuff that we could hardly have dreamt of finding in the shoddy retail outlets of those hard times back in India with its self-inflicted self-denial in the name of social equity. That the Indians have had second thoughts since then is another story.

In sharp contrast, thanks to the continuing demand for copper, although the warring, copper-hungry Americans were on their last legs in Vietnam, Zambia had been enjoying an unprecedented economic boom since the first flush of her independence from Britain in 1964. Conspicuous consumption was getting to be something of a habit with the new ruling class of Zambians. Saving for a rainy day was the farthest from their thoughts. A story that was doing the rounds at the time was that the Zambian parliament had even contemplated supplying beer 'on tap' to every household for next to nothing, as they would water!

That this honeymoon was not to last very long would become a sad commentary on how the short-sighted money managers of the country had been lulled into a sense of false

security. The beer story may well have been a canard put about by the detractors of the country, but the writing was soon to be on the wall. At the time of our arrival, however, the long bread lines and the never-ending queues that made you foot-sore as you waited patiently to procure daily necessities were still some time away. But when it did happen, many a grumbling Zambian must have in his heart of hearts yearned for the ‘good old’ Colonial days, just as the Hebrews to whom the accustomed oppression of their Egyptian masters must have time and again seemed more endurable by far than the freedom of the Covenant as they dithered for forty years in the desert. Satisfying immediate needs would seem to be more pressing to man than such abstractions as the concept of freedom.

In the January of 1972, the Zambian shop-shelves were still chock-full of consumer goods. And, the Zambian unit of currency, the Kwacha, was still strong fetching more than ten Indian Rupees to a Kwacha. And, S. M. Patel’s departmental store was the biggest of all the shops in Kabwe. Until independence, the place was out of bounds for ordinary African shoppers. If, however, they were willing to abase themselves, they could buy things like bread and milk and that sort of stuff through a hatch at one end of the shop where their presence would not offend the eyes of the lily-white shoppers. Dr. Kenneth Kaunda swore he would never eat meat again because, as the story goes, on one occasion, while Zambia was still Northern Rhodesia -so named after Cecil Rhodes the British coloniser *extraordinaire*- Kaunda had been asked to go round to the back of a butcher’s shop and buy his meat through a hatch! Was this very different from the tradesman’s entrance that made a man feel diminished as he delivered his goods at the back of the stately mansions in England?

Even as we were browsing among the shop shelves at S. M. Patel’s, who should I run into but my old college mate Thomachen as he was coming round one of the bays with his wife in tow. K.U.Thomas -that was his official name- and I had been residents at the University Hostel, when we were graduate students at the University College, Trivandrum. We were close friends and thick as thieves, then. Long after that, even after returning to India, we still are. When we meet at his place or mine, which is quite often, we still greet each other with the choicest Malayalam expletives, tongue firmly in cheek, a practice we had started as students at Trivandrum. This time around, though, caught by surprise and in his wife’s presence, he was a little less explicit in greeting me.

We had parted company well nigh eighteen years earlier to go our separate ways after our final exams and had become teachers, he to Haile Selassie’s Ethiopia and I to Kozhencherry. I was not aware that he had since then moved to Zambia to work for the Ministry of Education. After the initial surprise and the ensuing small talk we parted company, promising to meet again. I could see that Ammu had warmed to Chellamma (that was his wife’s name) almost instantly. My wife Ammu has the uncanny knack of breaking the ice and easily making friends with strangers and this occasion was no different. They have been very good friends since.

We spent a second night with the Georges. We had a lot of catching up to do since we had left Tanzania. We talked late into the night. At one point during the evening, I recall Thampy’s wife Jolly suddenly springing up as though she had remembered something, walking across the room to where the cuckoo wall clock was hanging and pulled down its weighted chains. This was not something one would usually take any particular notice of,

except that on this occasion the tug on one of the two chains was less than gentle and it came away in Jolly's hands to Thampy's obvious dismay. If looks could speak, the message would be unmistakable. It transpired that the clock had been acquired only weeks before that. If I were in Thampy's place at that precise moment, I would have probably reacted differently. Compared to my threshold of tolerance, Thampy's reaction had been one of admirable restraint. Anyway, that little mishap put paid to any further unselfconscious chitchat that we might have had for the night. We retired to bed soon after. The next morning, after breakfast, Thampy and Jolly drove us to St. Paul's, Mulungushi.

The school was a fully residential boys' secondary school run by the Marist Lay Brothers of Canada under the auspices of the Catholic Secretariat of Zambia. It stood in the middle of nowhere, so to speak, tucked away in an extensive campus to forestall unsolicited attention. The only sign of human habitation away from the immediate environs of the school was the daily sight of smoke rising, as we were to learn later, from a few scattered clusters of mud-and-wattle dwellings that dotted the scrubland around the campus itself but hidden away well out of sight. During the day, a handful of the villagers emerged from their rondavels and made their way into the campus in dribs and drabs, to work there as domestic help, only to melt back into the bushes at the end of the day. At night, however, sounds of beating drums coming from that direction could often be heard late into the night. It was well known that their revelry on such occasions was made merrier by long draughts of *Chibuku*, a potent concoction that they brewed from fermented maize.

The only occasion I remember seeing them in full force was when, some months after our arrival, in the first light that filtered through the fragile darkness of a frosty winter morning, they descended on our backyard carrying empty tin cans to gather what looked like gelled drops of water on the ground and literally falling over each other as they did so. Even as we watched, still sleepy-eyed, with ever increasing amazement, they began collecting, without so much as a by-your-leave, what we were to learn later to be 'frosted' termites that had in their tens of thousands carpeted our backyard, unable to take wing, after the downpour of the night before. At first glance through the early morning haze, we had mistaken that 'carpet' for a touch of frost. Our helper Jackson who hailed from that neighbourhood was directing the operations. We could now surmise that he must have been the one to carry back the news of this 'windfall' to the villagers. On asking him later what the 'harvest' was for, his cryptic answer was, 'We fry them'. It took us a while to figure out that the word he meant was 'fry', as Zambians generally articulated the consonants 'l' and 'r' interchangeably. A 'looking mirror', for instance, would sound something like a 'rookie miller'.

Kabwe, the nearest town, which could be reached only by a sixteen-mile stretch of narrow, corrugated, gravelled path, was the school's virtual lifeline. And that would dissolve into a slippery track at the slightest hint of rain. It would then challenge the driving skills of even the most intrepid of drivers to negotiate what could only be called an apology for a road, with elephant grass hemming it in from either side almost all the way to Kabwe.

The faculty lived on the campus in detached two or three-bedroom, purpose-built houses with corrugated asbestos roofs, each with its own front-lawn and a sizable backyard that would do nicely for a kitchen garden. Ours was a spacious one with lots of ground back and front. It was perhaps the biggest among the staff quarters, which came in different sizes. It stood at the very end of a path that veered off at right angles from the access road to the campus as it neared the main school building. Along that path, which ran a hundred yards or so, you drove past a row of smaller houses to your right, starting with the Zambian teacher Eric Nawa's quarters and past our compatriot O. D. George's and the Irishman George Champkin's, to reach our front yard and the car porch.

We would enter the house either from the car porch into the kitchen through a side door to your right or through a door at the left end of the veranda that opened into the living room. The living room ran along the whole length of the veranda in front. The living room also had access to another veranda at the back facing the backyard. As you entered the living room through the front door, to your left, partitioned from the living room with a sideboard, was the small dining area with direct access to the kitchen. At the other end of the living room, a door led into a corridor. The bedrooms, all three of them, and a common bathroom opened into the corridor. It was a spacious house that offered great possibilities for the home maker. Not having another bathroom, however, was a big drawback.

But the bigger inconvenience was that the school did not provide round-the-clock power supply. Its 'splendid isolation' had its virtues but at the same time, drawn back as the school was quite some distance away from the national power grid, it made it difficult for the school to get hooked up to the power supply line. The school, therefore, had to produce its own power with the help of a diesel-run generator, but the supply was not unlimited. It lasted only for six hours or so in the evenings. It was lights out at ten or not long thereafter for staff and students alike! Strange as it appeared to the uninitiated like us, the fridge in the kitchen worked on the heat radiated by a paraffin lamp with a glass chimney round its flame. The lighted lamp slid snugly at the back into a slot at the bottom end of the fridge, which would then, by some amazing alchemy, turn its innards cold! And if one did not sweep out the inevitable soot that the lamp gathered every few days, the fridge would soon turn warm and its contents go limp! The fridge was a Swedish-made Electrolux. And, we cooked our food on a paraffin-fired cooking range.

Although the house was said to be fully furnished, the furniture on offer was at best Spartan. Besides, the three-piece suite in our living room had seen better days. The settee in particular had big splotches left behind by the previous occupant's dogs. The drapes were definitely fraying at the edges. We had to have the suite re-covered and the furnishings changed.

It was the ground around the house that needed a makeover the most. We were told that the place was infested with snakes, especially the spitting cobra. In fact the house, which was the biggest on the campus, had lain vacant for more than a year before we moved in mainly because the 'wannabe' occupiers had been put off by the likelihood of having to deal with the pesky snakes and other creepy crawly creatures, like scorpions and spiders, to boot.

A hair-raising encounter that I had with Tarantulas, the reputedly fearsome spiders, two years later, was one such. Thankfully it did not happen in our house. One of the other houses had fallen vacant when Fernandes, a colleague of ours, had gone on transfer to a school in Chipata in the Eastern Province. It took a few months before it was allotted to a new arrival, a Mr. Verghese from Kerala. Barely an hour or so after he had moved in, he came running to our place, looking agitated and beside himself with worry. It transpired that his bathroom walls and the bathtub were virtually covered over with a thicket of the furry arachnids. He did not have a clue as to what he could do. At first I was at a loss too, but then I decided to use a flaming torch with a long handle to singe them first and then crush them with a broom and that from a safe distance 'to make assurance doubly sure'.

As I said, the house that had been allotted to us was Hobson's choice; it was either that or nothing at all. And we were determined to make the most of it. There was no hedge along the borders of the ground, which was unkempt all over. So first we grew a row of bushes all around to raise a hedge. The ground had been covered with wild undergrowth. Machetes were used to cut them all down. The residents of the campus were free to borrow a lawn mower from the school whenever it was needed, so we too availed ourselves of that facility and gave the place more than a good going over. We laid out a lawn in front and started a kitchen garden at the back. Both the lawn and the garden flourished and in good time we could enjoy the fruits of our labour.

Soon the homestead assumed a character all its own. And when the time came for us to move to the Copperbelt Teachers' Training College on transfer, there were quite a few teachers, who had cast covetous eyes in the direction of our made-over house, falling over each other to get there first.

And as for the cobras, the threat proved to be rather exaggerated. In fact, with a sufficiently long stick to 'crush its head' from a safe distance, you could deal with it quite easily. Interestingly, spitting cobras are not known to bite its adversaries but rather 'spit' in their eyes when provoked. The stream of poison that it spat out in a trajectory from its reared hood could reputedly reach a distance of six or seven feet. Any hopeful slayer of the serpent, therefore, would need to wear protective eye-shades to block the potent venom from entering his eyes and causing blindness; unless promptly attended to.

Our compatriot and friend O.D. George and Annakutty his wife, who lived just a hop, step and jump away from us, were momentarily flummoxed when a snake once trespassed into their house, of all places, through the hole in his toilet bowl! How the creature could have found access to the house the way it did was a mystery. Could it have been from the cesspit? Anyway, George quickly regained his composure and dealt with the problem although I do not recall the precise strategy he employed to get rid of the intruder. Malayalees, especially the 'country bumpkins', are generally not known to recoil in fear when they encounter snakes.

In fact there are a few temples and shrines in rural Kerala that house snakes and venerate them. The one at *Mannarshaala* near Alleppey is known to attract devotees in large numbers all through the year. Not many Malayalee men have a phobia about coming upon snakes unexpectedly.

I can recall only one occasion when I had to deal with a spitting cobra at Mulungushi. And this was after the trespassing reptile had had a brush with our dog Booty and spat in his eyes. We had named him Booty after the dog we had when we were at Lawrence School. Booty may have rushed at the intruder instinctively without knowing what was coming. And his yelps of pain alerted me that something was seriously amiss. I came out to see one very much roused cobra still swaying its raised hood from side to side as though spoiling for a spat. Our first concern was for the dog. While Ammu held the dog down, I sent a jet of water from the garden hose to wash out the poison from its eyes. Then I turned my attention to the snake which was still visibly hot under the collar. With shades protecting my eyes, I prodded it with a long stick. Predictably, with each prod, it spat out a fine jet of 'spittle' in my direction. It was done with such force that with every liquescent hiss, the snake's hood hit the ground with a pronounced plop. And, it was not very difficult for me to hop back out of harm's way each time. What was interesting, however, was that the provoked serpent's whiplash strikes grew weaker with each shy and the plops grew fainter. Naturally, the jets of spit had also become thinner. After a minute or two of this 'give and take', my finishing it off was just a formality. This is pretty much the same tactic that a mongoose adopts to do a cobra in, except that it circles the wound-up snake, just out of the reach of its striking hood until the snake has visibly grown too weak to fend off the mongoose.

Black mambas are a different proposition altogether. They are known to be the most poisonous of all African snakes. The venom is neurotoxic. The creature is retiring by nature and extremely shy of humans, but if inadvertently provoked would attack with great speed. And the victim dies within minutes. In all my twelve-odd years in Zambia I never once saw a black mamba *in situ*. I did see a few in large glass cases at a snake sanctuary in Kafue. Kafue is about half an hour's drive from Lusaka.

Brother Leugeot (?) –I am not sure if I can ever remember to get French names spelt correctly-, who had been the Brother Superior in Mulungushi before our time there, we also came to learn, was an amateur herpetologist. He had a strange fascination for snakes, which his colleagues could not quite comprehend. Wherever he went 'hunting' for snakes to catch them and milk their venom, he would invariably carry a survival kit containing anti-venom vaccine, syringes and what have you, just in case. Sure enough, once in attempting to bag a mamba, he was bitten by it almost as though it was the sequel to a self-fulfilling prophecy. He, however, had the presence of mind to inject himself promptly with a double dose of the antidote. Yet, he soon lost consciousness and had to be rushed to the hospital. He lay in a coma hovering between life and death for some time before he finally pulled through. Perhaps, it was the double-strength anti-venom shot that saved his life. After that brush with death, he moved to Salisbury in Northern Rhodesia on transfer.

The Marist brothers of Mulungushi were a mixed lot. Austerity, Chastity and Obedience were the three pillars of their oath of allegiance to their order. This was not to say that they were all like puppets on a string dancing to an unseen puppeteer's tune. They were very much flesh and blood, each with his own character traits.

Brother Marcel Lemoyne, the principal, had a charismatic personality. In his interpersonal relationships, he was affable and had what one might call the deft touch. As

an administrator, in dealing with either malingering teachers or intractable students, he had a way that was effortlessly effective. In his chatty approach to the fairer sex, one got the impression that he was not the sort of person who would want to remain stubbornly celibate for too long. He was an extrovert who enjoyed company and was not averse to a goodly tipple without showing any noticeable ill effects. This was not to say that he indulged himself as a matter of habit. He was not averse to a drink or two, but only socially and only in the company of his peers.

Not long after we joined the school, we were sorry to see him leave for Lusaka in the line of duty to assume the responsibilities of the Educational Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat. We were to learn later that he broke the vow of celibacy he had earlier taken, married a Zambian lady and raised a family, which was as it should be for an outgoing person like him. How well this went down with his French Canadian compatriots of the Marist Order is not known.

Brother Leopold Robert, who took over the reins of the school after Brother Marcel's departure, could not have been more different; as like as chalk to cheese. A private joke among some of us was that he was a leopard that changed its spots. He was not a particularly sociable person. You could never be sure where you stood with him. For instance, he would be quite approachable and ready to listen to you in the privacy of his office, but unreceptive and standoffish, especially during a staff meeting.

I remember one such that was convened at short notice to choose a head boy for the school. Some argued for taking the line of least resistance and choosing a particular student who they had found habitually recalcitrant and difficult to deal with in class. Testing the threshold of his teachers' patience was his favourite pastime. He was, however, discerning enough not to trifle with all. The ostensible argument of those that had been at the receiving end of his antics was that he would turn over a new leaf when he was entrusted with such a responsibility. I forget the first name of the student. Mubanga was his surname. Ammu and I vehemently opposed the proposal, arguing that he would not be a role model for the students to look up to. In fact Ammu warned the principal that the boy in question would only lead the school, in her words, 'to hell'. Nevertheless, in spite of the flaw in his character to be disruptive in class, we said we would not oppose his appointment as one of the prefects in view of the chance that his rough edges might be rounded under an upright leader, however remote it might be that he would rehabilitate himself. Our protest notwithstanding, the principal appointed him head boy.

Ammu remembers having earlier had a row with him in her geography lesson soon after we had joined the school. It was her very first lesson in Mubanga's class. As soon as the lesson began, making as though he was taking a book out of his desk, the boy lifted his hinged desktop and dropped it shut with a bang. Ammu gave him a knowing look. A minute later he did it again. This time she told him if he did it again she would exclude him from her class. He had apparently thought he could call her bluff and test her threshold of patience. He did it a third time. She deliberately walked up to him, caught him by his collar, stood him up and asked him to get out. To Ammu's great relief, he did not resist. To this day, she has not been able to figure out how she had found the gumption to do what she did.

The matter was duly reported to the principal. However, instead of taking disciplinary action forthwith, he merely asked the boy to attend his geography lessons in another stream. That miffed Ammu no end. A week later, the principal asked Ammu if she would care to have the boy back in her class. ‘Not unless he is ready to apologize in class publicly’ was Ammu’s curt rejoinder. As Ammu was teaching there next, Mubanga suddenly materialised at the classroom door and stood there trying sheepishly to attract her attention. Ammu went up to him. He apologised to her and added that he wanted to be in her class again, but implored her not to shame him in public. He looked sufficiently contrite. Ammu relented and let him into the class, but not before letting the class know that he had apologised to her. This incident must have weighed heavily with us when we later opposed the proposal that Mubanga be made the head boy.

It was not long before our worst fears were proved right. It was the last day of term. Mubanga and his fellow prefects skulked out of the campus after supper, went to a shebeen in the village and got themselves drunk on Chibuku. Totally inebriated, they lurched back to the campus. They saw that the lights in the principal’s office were on and, inexplicably, decided to go straight to his office. Could they have feared that, their absence having been discovered, the principal was waiting up to haul them over the coals? Could it have been a deliberate ploy as a pre-emptive show of unfeigned remorse? In the event, they could only respond to the principal’s grilling in incoherent monosyllables, their confusion having been compounded by their wooziness. After sending them off to their dormitories, believe it or not, he came straight to our house and knocked on our door. Looking suitably chastened, he told us what had transpired and told Ammu how right she had been after all, adding with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, ‘He did not lead them to hell exactly, but he did lead them to a bar!’ In an instant, Leopold’s stock went up in our eyes.

As we had feared, Mubanga was expelled from school after the matter had been referred to the Ministry of Education for their ruling, which was given without delay. And this was in spite of our entreaties that he need only be stripped of his prefectship but that he should be given a chance to rehabilitate himself. We were to be proved right thereafter. Four years later, on our way to Kitwe in the Copperbelt, the police flagged us down at Kapiri Mposhi. We had by then got quite used to this routine. This was done every now and then to make sure that we had our national registration ID cards and the car’s papers on us. They would also check to see if the car was roadworthy. Invariably, the lights all round, the hand brake, the tyre treads, and the horn and the wipers would all be checked. We would have a private laugh every time we heard the officer saying, ‘Hootaah, Saah’, ‘Wipaah, Saah’ and so on. This time it was no different. When one of the police officers finally bent down to give us the ‘go ahead’, lo and behold, who would appear in the front window but Mubanga our hero himself in person and in a police uniform! He was as happy to see us as we, him. After all, he had rehabilitated himself!

That brings to mind an encounter of a different kind that I had with the police, this time not far from Kitwe. I was driving up a gradient slowly, having to tag along with increasing impatience behind a long, fully-loaded, flat-bedded truck that was wheezing along. Obviously, I could not see the road ahead beyond the brow of the hill, but the driver of the truck, perhaps out of the goodness of his heart, waved me on from his high

perch. Disregarding the unbroken double line running down the middle of the road, I stepped on the accelerator, overtook the truck and was coasting along down the other side of the hill when, as if from nowhere, a police car appeared, its siren blaring, flagged me down to the verge as it shot past and came to a screeching halt in front of our car. A man in police uniform got out of the car and as he approached me, I asked him, sounding miffed at having been pulled up, ‘What is this all about, constable?’ Instantly, I knew that I had riled him as he gave me a glare and shot back, ‘I am not a constable! I’m the superintendent of police. Follow me!’ He got back into the car and signalled me with a derisive swing of his right arm to follow his car. We drove straight to the nearest police station, which was at Mindolo not far from the well-known Mindolo Ecumenical Centre where I was known to many. I was asked to wait, while he went into his office and slammed the door behind him, still in a huff. After I had cooled my heels for what seemed like ages, he came out, told me what my offence was and asked me to cough up the prescribed fine before leaving. Fortunately, no one I knew had witnessed my humiliation.

I am afraid the thread of my story is once again lost in the desultory narrative. Let me backtrack and pick it up from where I left off at Mulungushi. As I was saying, there was more to Leopold than met the eye. He kept his cards close to his chest, but he improved with use and one could warm to him all right, even if only slowly. Anyway, I was pleasantly surprised when he gave me a testimonial which, among other things, said, “...*Pupils appreciated his lessons and his ‘savoir faire’. His command of English language made him valuable. He took an active part in the School Magazine and was in charge of preparing the boys for a national quiz. (They came second). Our teams, under his care, came first and third in a public speaking contest run by the Rotary Club. Mr. John was elected Secretary-treasurer of the newly started Staff Club. He did very good work at St.Paul’s.*” Coming as it did from someone who was parsimonious with words, of course, I was flattered no end!

That reminds of an inspection report that P. B. Kopolo, the Regional Inspector of Secondary Schools, had written after observing my English Literature class on 26th January 1973. Let me quote the relevant part. “...*The topic was ‘James Ngugi’ taken from ‘The River Between’. He read the story to the class and paused when and wherever he felt it was necessary to explain or clarify a word, a phrase or a sentence to make sure the pupils were following him. From time to time, he would check on their comprehension by asking them questions as he proceeded. ...Discipline, tone, atmosphere and attitude were quite sound. The teacher’s voice was (is) very good indeed. Mr. John knows what he is doing, hence his steadiness and confidence in himself even when before the inspector.*” If this sounds like trumpet-blowing once too often, let me hasten to add that it was mainly this report that was instrumental in the Ministry of Education’s promoting me later to the headship of the English Department at the Copperbelt Secondary Teachers’ College at Kitwe.

While I am still puffed up with this self-promotion, I might as well add to my list of testimonials the one that I received from R. C. B. Sibisi, the principal of the said training college when I later left it to join the United Nations Institute for Namibia. Let me quote the relevant part from it: “...*Mr. John has performed his duties as head of the department*

and Lecturer very well and earned himself respect from his colleagues and students alike for his academic competence and professional integrity. ...he has proved himself an able organiser of language teaching materials. He ran the language laboratory of this college very successfully during his tenure of office. The college will certainly miss his services. Finally, I am pleased to state that Mr. John's character during his stay at the college was beyond reproach – a testimony to his religious background.” Not having been a church-going Christian at Kitwe, I am to this day baffled by how he could have drawn such a conclusion. And, I had never worn my religion on my sleeve. And this, despite my religious upbringing!

To go back to the brothers of Mulungushi, let me begin with Brother Lucio who joined the school some time after we had. He was from Spain and he was full of life and high spirits. And that was only as it should be from someone with his Latin *joie de vivre*. He liked his wine and his badminton in equal measure. He was a frequent visitor to our house. More than once, he gifted us large, wickerwork-covered flagons of *rosé* brought in on the quiet by long-distance truckers from Malawi and meant mainly for the brothers who relished this earthy beverage on the quiet. The brothers would occasionally invite the faculty for a film show followed by aperitifs and dinner. On one such occasion, Lucio regaled us with Spanish songs of which I can remember only his version of *Guantanamera*. He had a good singing voice.

And then there was Brother Mailloux. He taught Biology. Did I say ‘taught’? Of that, his students were certainly not fully convinced. His management of classes was almost comical. He always struck others as being a bit of a clown. Whether this was by choice or by necessity to make up for his weak classroom persona was anybody’s guess. With his lean frame, ungainly gait and his squeaky voice, he was the ideal candidate for nomination not so much to the manly brotherhood of Marists as to the mirthful brotherhood of clowns. In spite of his harmless looks, that he could be mean-spirited if he so chose was never made more apparent than when he had kicked up a fuss and kerfuffle about the school giving our Mubanga of the Chibuku fame a reference to apply for a job after he was expelled. In the event, unbeknown to my colleagues, I gave him one. I suspect that Mailloux was a constant embarrassment even to his co-religionists from ‘French’ Canada.

Brother Manuel, who was from Spain, was the perfect foil for his compatriot the outgoing Lucio. Stern and unsmiling, he was uncharacteristically introverted for a Spaniard. His one saving grace was his tennis playing skills. Many were the afternoons when he and I would knock the ball around on the one and only tennis court on the campus. After Brother Leopold, it was his turn on the rota to be the principal of the school. We left Mulungushi shortly after his elevation.

From my Marist colleagues to some of my other colleagues was a leap across a chasm. For sheer commitment to work, not many could touch the brothers. Of course Mailloux was an exception to that rule. The only Zambian on the staff, Eric Nawa, I was soon to suspect, enjoyed some sort of unspoken immunity from censure by virtue of his ethnicity. The powers-that-be were uncharacteristically loath to pull him up for his acts of omission and commission. His teaching, such as it was, proved to be only an apology for one. He consumed inordinate amounts of booze, whether it was of the native variety

Chibuku or of beer, and could drink anyone under the table. The delayed ill effects, however, would descend upon him with a vengeance only the morning after the night before. And, if he turned up for teaching regardless, often with his shirt tails hanging, you could make an educated guess as to why. And, many were the times when he took 'sick' leave after going on a binge the previous night.

One Sunday evening, Eric was our guest along with all our colleagues for dinner at our place. For any social occasion in Zambia, it was *de rigueur* to provide beer in large quantities. Zambians would give even the Germans a run for their money as the biggest beer bibbers in the world. Guests would be free to help themselves to as many bottles as they wanted to consume. Those who fancied beer with their hors d'oeuvre would usually limit themselves to one bottle or two at most on such occasions. And then, it would only be with a dignified gap between. We were flabbergasted when Eric made a beeline for the beer crates, helped himself as I remember to five bottles of beer at one fell swoop, carried them in the crook of his arm, sat himself down in a corner and then proceeded to quaff the stuff straight from the bottle one after the other, opening each bottle with his teeth, totally unmindful of the others in the room. I saw him, 'doing the honours', once more. I did not keep count after that. Sure enough, he was absent from classes the next day. If Eric shirked work without any qualms of being noticed, George Champkin did so with so much more finesse. He was not one to indulge overly. He never feigned sickness or absented himself from school. He would turn up in the staff room on the dot at five minutes to eight, carrying in the crook of his arm not bottles –perish the thought- but a tall pile of exercise books. Anyone seeing him for the first time would think: there goes a conscientious teacher who has the interests of his students at heart. He would each time put the pile of books down loudly enough on the long table in the staff room with the smug satisfaction that he had caught everyone's attention.

If anyone, however, thought that George had brought in the books duly corrected, then he would be woefully mistaken, for if that were the case, why would he want to carry the very same pile of books that had remained unopened all day long in the staff room, back to his house? It was the same routine every day and it was not as if the brothers hadn't noticed it. Being a good practising Catholic and a Paddy to boot, he could get away with this bit of guile as apparently the good Catholic brothers were apt to turn a blind eye when one of their own laity strayed from the straight and the narrow. In my eyes, however, his stock rose when he proved himself to be a pro at solving the daily crossword. Many were the times we indulged in that pastime during recess, as I recall. Anyway, he left the school a year or two after we had got there.

George Champkin had been our neighbour. His wife was not a teacher. They had a son, a chubby, fair-haired toddler who was pretty much left to his own devices when his mother was in the kitchen. He was a sweet child. He would sometimes stray into our house especially when O. D. George's kids were there to play with our daughter Bina. He would have, strapped around his waist and between his legs, a thickly padded diaper that would now and again get fully 'loaded'. I remember, on one occasion, when the 'dyke' inevitably broke and the stuff was running down his legs, Ammu had to take him back to his mother, who was obviously embarrassed and suitably apologetic.

When the Champkins left, they had a garage sale for disposing of the things they were leaving behind. And Varghese of the tarantula fame bought some of that stuff. Among the things he bought, there was a wooden tea tray and thereby hangs a tale. Not long after that, when some of our compatriots from Kabwe paid him a social call as they were wont to do with every new arrival from Kerala, it so happened that he served them tea and with it a typical Kerala snack.

And, the snack happened to be the ubiquitous ‘*Ariunda*’ –*Ari* for ‘rice’ and *unda* for ‘a ball-shaped mass’ in Malayalam- made out of roasted rice-flour dough mixed with melted molasses or treacle, hand pressed and rounded into lemon-sized balls. But, if the molasses turned too sticky in the mixing, the resultant ‘shots’ would become too hard to get your teeth into. My wife tells me that my youngest brother Tom, when he was still a schoolboy at Kumbanad, would come to the tea table armed with a hammer, if he guessed that *Ariunda* was on offer, just to tease his mother. On this occasion, Varghese happened to serve the round things in his recently acquired tea tray. As he went from one guest to the other, he was blissfully oblivious of the little globes running all over the smooth tray, skittery somewhat like blobs of mercury on a tabletop. And amid the exchanged looks and the quiet mirth that went round the room, no one had thought of telling him that those balls could have been served in a bowl or a dish on the tray! For fear that he might be offended by any gratuitous advice, they must have kept a discreet silence. I might add, however, that they found the *Ariunda* soft and tasty.

In more ways than one, Varghese was known for being gauche. When once he visited our place, we served him cup cakes complete with paper cups. It was quite some time after he had gone that we chanced upon two chewed cake cups thrust between the cushions in the settee in our living room. Again, once as he was walking home from school, he suddenly felt the urge to relieve himself and without feeling the slightest bit self-conscious, he unbuttoned his fly and coolly took a pee with the nearest tree for cover. George our compatriot who had caught him in the act told him gently that it was not the done thing in these parts although he might have got away with it back home. His immediate response was, “*Georgeay* (Oh, George), *Annaan moothaalum maramkettam marakkumo?*” Roughly translated, it meant something like ‘Oh George, will a squirrel even when it has grown old ever forget how to climb a tree?’ In spite of this gaucherie, people were inclined to bear with him as he was still trying to get to grips with his new life.

His ineffectual efforts to learn driving gave his colleagues more cause for endless merriment. One or two of them, who had earnestly tried to help him with his driving, gave up in despair because he was practically unteachable. His hands and eyes were always out of sync. Grappling with the floor shift and searching for the foot pedals after starting the car on his own, he had on one occasion lost control and driven his Volkswagen straight into a thicket. He came back on foot to seek assistance. When asked by his sympathetic neighbours what had happened, he kept repeating, ‘My hold on the steering wheel was steady. I never let go of it’. Next thing we knew, his badly dented car with its ‘eyes’ shut was towed back to the campus and was seen, minus tyres, propped up on bricks, in his garage. The tyres had been removed lest the ubiquitous pickers and stealers laid their eyes on them.

He spoke English in a flat monotone, not having a clue about stress and intonation, let alone pronunciation, which was an obvious crossover from his mother tongue. A week or so after he started teaching, he urgently buttonholed me in the staff room and said, “*Yoosufay, (Oh Yoosuf) njaan parayunnathu pillayrke manasilaakunnilla, avar parayunnathu enikkum.*” That is, his students do not understand a word of what he says and he, what they say. His colleagues would say behind his back that he spoke two languages. One was, of course, his mother tongue Malayalam and the other, Gibberish! It was not long before he decided to leave. Soon after that, to everyone’s surprise he found an opening in Nigeria.

Another colleague from Kerala, O. D. George was a friendly sort. He and his wife Annakutty were much younger than us. They helped us a great deal when we were settling in. Annakutty helped Ammu to set up her kitchen, which took a day or two, and until that was done we had eaten at the Georges’. George would drive us to Kabwe for our shopping needs every two days or so since there were no shops in Mulungushi. This went on until I could buy a car, which took about two weeks what with having to apply for a loan and get the money in hand and another two weeks or so until I could obtain a Zambian driving licence although off and on I had had at least twenty years of driving experience behind me and even then when I took the first test in Kabwe they failed me because they thought that shifting gears with one hand and signalling with the other at the same time was too fanciful for their liking. George was hugely amused. George taught Maths at school and was a good teacher. George and Annakutty soon became our family friends.

George liked ball games and especially struck a pretty volleyball. There were no flies on George and he never missed a trick. At weekends, he used to play gin rummy with his friends in Kabwe. Ammu and I were also soon roped in to help enlarge the ‘quorum’. We played for fun and sometimes also for stakes. But, the amounts risked were never too high. But if one were a chronic loser, in time one could be out of pocket pretty steeply.

Each of us took turns at hosting these card sessions. The hosts of the day always provided the needed nourishment during the long sessions and, not infrequently, to offer sympathy to him who needed it most. That is, to him who lost his shirt on any given day? There was one among us who, defying the law of averages, kept declaring a full hand far too often to have not aroused suspicion that he was not above cheating. Yet, no one was willing to question his honesty since he was the oldest of the group. Except on one occasion, George, who could take it no longer, flew off the handle.

As ill-luck would have it, we happened to be the hosts on that day. George spotted the ‘legerdemain’ and caught him red-handed as he was deftly swapping his dealt hand with a full hand that had obviously been secreted under his thighs earlier. George then proceeded to give him a tongue lashing in no uncertain terms. Initially, the man protested his innocence but to no avail. Someone tried to mollify George, but he went on relentlessly until the delinquent sat there stripped of all dignity, a sad figure of a man who should have known better. And, although it served him right, we as hosts felt bad about not having tried to stop George from venting his ire on him in public. This incident caused a lot of bad blood between some of them and us. They had assumed for some reason that

we had deliberately engineered this confrontation. Anyway, to cut a long story short, this proved to be an object lesson for us and we never played cards again for stakes.

In 1980, along with his family, George left for South Africa to better his prospects as a teacher. We had by then moved to Lusaka. In transit to Johannesburg, they stopped over in Lusaka for two days. We had put them up and, as luck would have it, disaster very nearly struck them. George and I were out doing some last minute shopping downtown, when my car was broken into and George's bag nicked. Their passports and tickets and travellers cheques were all in that bag.

We reported the matter to the nearest police station but instead of acting promptly, the officer in charge wanted to go through the customary bureaucratic rigmarole of preparing a first information report and what have you. Irked by the officer's tardiness, I had to flash my diplomatic ID –I had by then joined the United Nations- before he would deign to order an armed constable to accompany us. And, sure enough, he led us to a spot where we saw the thieves rifling through George's bag. It was uncanny how the cop could have zeroed in on them so unerringly! As soon as they saw us, they cut and ran but leaving the bag behind. And, to his immense relief, George was able to retrieve everything except the traveller's cheques. We contacted the bank, got those cheques cancelled and new ones issued to replace the lost ones.

They had not been so lucky on an earlier occasion a few years before. Break-ins have been endemic to Zambia for as long as anyone would care to remember. Every expatriate will have a story to tell of how he was robbed or his house broken into at some time or the other.

Thus it was that George's house was broken into late one evening. The family had retired to bed early. It was not long before they heard riffling noises in the house. When Annakutty turned on the bedside lamp, what does she see but an intruder dropping from his hand something that he was holding as he made haste to bolt out of the bedroom. They were terrified. George came running over to our place to seek help. Ammu and I locked our front door and accompanied George back to his place to give them moral support, if nothing else. We returned to our place about half an hour later, only to find that our house had also been broken into during that short span. The thief must have shrewdly guessed that George would come to us and had planned his operation carefully. To cut a long story short, George lost a wristwatch and we, a two-in-one radio-player. While this drama was being played out, fortunately Bina was sleeping in her bedroom undisturbed as were George's children in theirs! We had thus become partners in distress.

We were sorry to see the Georges go. A quarter of a century was to pass before we met them again. And the occasion was our fiftieth wedding anniversary. They brought us a gift, which we shall always treasure. It was a beautifully preserved, hollow Ostrich egg, with African motifs painted round its lacquered surface and its big end mounted on a polished wooden base. It now adorns our sitting room.

Thomachen and Chellamma were frequent visitors to Mulungushi, especially on weekends. Their daughters Beena, Reena and Anita would be with them, of whom the youngest one Anita and our daughter Bina were roughly the same age. And that gave our

daughter Bina one more friend to play with over the weekend. They would spend the day with us before going back. This was a welcome change for us from the tedium of our isolated existence at Mulungushi in the back of beyond, as one might say. Thomachen taught at the Kalonga Secondary School in Kabwe, only a half-hour drive from our place. And, we would return the compliment by a 'day-spend' with them, from time to time. Even after we shifted to Kitwe and later to Lusaka, we kept in touch.

When people relocate to unfamiliar surroundings, it is quite natural that they try and make the most of what is obtaining in the new milieu they find themselves in. Zambia has a great deal to offer in the way of beautiful settings that nature has bestowed it with.

The Luangwa Valley Game Reserve is one such. Luangwa Valley is one of Africa's prime wild sanctuaries. Situated at the end of the Great Rift Valley, it is the last, untouched wilderness of Africa. Down the valley flows the Luangwa River, in which you will find frolicking hippos by the hundreds shooting salvos of water from their flared nose holes, and on its banks crocodiles sunbathing and the odd ones suddenly breaking ranks and slithering down into the river with ponderous expectations and occasionally lashing about in crimson swirls. There is an abundance of animal and bird species wherever you turn in the wide horizons of the valley. Game-viewing drives in redone jeeps, tiered seats and all, and covered mini-buses for the less daring -of which number Ammu was one when we visited the valley- with reassuringly armed guides who ensure that you see all that the valley has to offer.

Grazing herds of antelope of all kinds, wildebeests and zebras in small clusters, lumbering herds of elephants making stately progress almost unmindful of human presence, nervously scurrying baboons at the approach of men and machines, vast herds of wild buffaloes thundering headlong in phalanxes along the valley expanses shaking the very foundations of the earth and trailing clouds of pulverised dust, to name but a few images, do provide a once in a lifetime experience that is hard to forget. Then there is the Thornicroft's giraffe unique to the Luangwa Valley. At night, you are often awakened by the eerie laugh of the hyenas.

We visited the valley in 1983. We took a Norman Carr Safari package offer for two days and two nights. We travelled by air back and forth. We were met at the Luangwa airstrip and driven first to a half-way-house for a sumptuous lunch and thereafter to the Sanctuary in South Luangwa where we stayed in a comfortable, thatched chalet *a la Africa* that was ensuite with running hot and cold water. In the late afternoon of the first day, we were taken round the park game-watching. We saw a whole range of the creatures in the wild, but not any of the big cats. It was the same story the next day. The one incident we could write home about was when a jumbo that broke away from the herd turned round with its trunk raised, faced us menacingly and trumpeted. Momentarily, my heart was in my mouth. The guide in the leading vehicle promptly clapped his hands two or three times and the gentle giant as if on cue turned back and slunk away like a naughty child that had just been given a scolding. Again, the next morning, from the sit-out at the back of the chalet we could see an elephant up close sedately breaking twigs and grazing in the bush nearby, apparently relishing its arboreal repast. The food on offer for the humans too was toothsome without exception. Clearly, Norman Carr had given us value for money;

comforts of home in the verdant wilderness, smack in the middle of a game reserve, if ever there was one.

Mosi-o-Tunya or the Victoria Falls is another such happy setting. Again, Zambia, as with African countries in general, is a country of distances between human settlements. From the Copperbelt to Livingstone, for instance, is a good eight-hour drive with not many towns in between, if you chose to drive non-stop. Rarely would folks on a holiday, with time on their hands, trouble to step on the accelerator and do those stretches at one mad go.

Instead, every now and then, you would pull up at a lay-by, set back well out of the way of traffic, for the benefit of road users. They are generally kept clean and tidy. There are concrete benches and tables too for the weary traveller to rest and recuperate. With the help of some sustenance to go with it, a stopover is always enjoyable when you are travelling in a convoy. On long trips, each car would always carry a hamper of goodies for the travellers to stop and munch when they feel peckish, and beverages to wash it down. One such stopover remains deeply stuck in my memory, especially of the olfactory kind, if only for the wrong reasons. After a long drive, when you feel stiff in your legs, you would make it a habit to pull up at a lay-by and stretch your legs for a few minutes before you get back behind the wheel.

On the occasion in question, after I got back into the car and pulled off without immediately realising what I had stepped on a moment earlier, my nose was assailed by a vaguely familiar smell. It took a moment or two before it dawned on me what was causing it. 'Shit!' I swore under my breath, which in this instance meant more than just a swear word. And the stuff stank to high heaven! The truth is I had been cautioned about just such a possibility and been advised to look where I was going, but I had laughed it off, needlessly adding rather crudely, 'If people have to shit in the open real bad, it would smell, wouldn't it?' We had to backtrack hastily to the lay-by. As I was cleaning my shoes, the others grimaced in disgust. Then, I had to clean the floor mat in the car. A deodorant had to be repeatedly sprayed in the car before we could resume our journey. Even then the familiar, crappy smell lingered. After a pregnant silence, my wife said completely deadpan, 'It does smell somewhat, doesn't it?' For the first time I felt almost relieved at the thought that Indians were not the only ones who would 'defecate everywhere', as V. S. Naipaul would declare in his book *An Area of Darkness*.

I remember visiting Livingstone twice. On the first occasion, we had Titus Mathew and his family, our friends from our Tanganyika days, accompanying us and on the second occasion it was Thomachen and family who accompanied us. On both occasions, we made progress at a stately pace calling on friends at Lusaka, Monze and Choma, the customary 'watering holes' on the way. The last stop was at Choma where we spent the night with our friends Sunny and Lillykutty, both teachers at the Choma Secondary School. It was a school run by the UCZ viz. the United Church of Zambia, something like a Protestant counterpart of the Catholic Secretariat. Livingstone is about two hours away by car from Choma, with no human settlements to speak of in between. As far as eye could see, the road stretched like a ribbon across the savannah rising and falling to the horizon. Now and again you would pass through short strips of forestland. Animal crossings are clearly signposted to warn the unwary driver. I recall at least one incident in

which a passing driver was instantly killed when he had driven into an eland, which chose that very moment to cross his path. And elands are not exactly the smallest of creatures! It is a type of large African antelope.

In those days, it was a single-lane, macadamised road, with hardly any room for an oncoming vehicle to pass you without its driver being compelled to pull up on the hard shoulder if your car were hogging the road. When we were on the highway, we did not see many cars or, for that matter, many people, which was not particularly surprising in that part of Africa. That reminds me of the time, some years later, when we drove all the way from Francistown in Botswana to Livingstone in Zambia, a distance of 500 kilometres, without seeing a single living thing on the highway except for an ostrich or two! Incidentally, by the time we reached Livingstone I was virtually covered from head to foot in fine white dust and looked somewhat like Casper the Ghost out on a safari. We were driving through the Kalahari Desert, after all. Africa never ceases to amaze you.

When you have covered about three quarters of the distance from Choma to Livingstone, still twenty miles or so short of your destination, you begin to hear a distant rumble that grows louder and louder until it turns into a deafening roar as you get closer to the Victoria Falls, by which time you will have already turned on your headlights full beam and wipers full speed to make the road ahead visible, even then just barely. Such is the overarching range of the spray that is blown up from the churning waters below! In the rainy season, you would need to walk to the viewing point wearing a hooded mackintosh, unless of course you would choose to look like a wet chicken after the drench. And when the river is in full spate, the misty spray that settles like a mantle over the tumultuous rush of waters would make viewing the falls in all its glory well nigh impossible. But as if to make up for that, your eyes meet a stunning rainbow arcing over the falls as the sun shines through the refracting watery mist. And, only in summer, when the flow of the river has turned thin, can one view the full magnitude and depth of the falls and, churning at the bottom, the white waters through which adventure seekers in their kayaks dare to raft. And nary a man, seeing the falls for the first time, can view it without an involuntary intake of breath.

Since independence, there has been a concerted effort to revive Zambian folk art forms like the various tribal dances and music. As Zambia is a multi-tribal society made up of tribes, some large some small, the government had from the outset embarked on a programme of national integration, the main plank of which was to institutionalise English as the official language of Zambia. John Mwanakatwe, the first Minister of Education in independent Zambia, had set this in motion. But this did not mean that the Zambians were willing to forget their culture, which they did not have to be told was inextricably tied up with their heritage. And in line with that, the government had set up cultural villages to showcase the customs and traditions that had been and still are part and parcel of their everyday life. I clearly remember visiting one such heritage village near Livingstone on our second visit there.

And Bina, our daughter, was with us. She was nearly four. And Anita, Thomachen's daughter was also in the group. When we went into the wattle enclosure, a masked dance troupe was about to perform. The dancers had on scary masks. As they began to dance to the accompaniment of crashing drumbeats and ululations that rose from the throats of the

chitenge-clad women, who were part of the troupe, the resultant theatrical effect of sight and sound scared the living daylights out of the girls so much that they screamed, ran to their mothers and clung to them tightly as though their life depended on it. They had neither seen anything remotely resembling the outlandish dancers nor heard the banshee wails of the dancing women before. For their sakes, we had to leave all too soon.

On our return journey from Livingstone, we stopped over in Choma as usual. It was about that time that a cousin of mine, a nurse who was working in Choma Government Hospital, was going through a spell of depression because a doctor in the same hospital had led her up the garden path –yes, you have guessed it right- the primrose path of dalliance. To make matters worse, she had missed her monthly periods for a while. Fortunately, that scare soon proved to be a false alarm. Smooching with the lover you trust often prompts you to lower your defences willingly. Not to put too fine a point on it, “Greater love hath no woman than this, that she loses her cherry for a lover”. But then, you soon learn from your mistakes, don’t you? Ammu and I decided to take her with us to Mulungushi in the hope that a change of scene might help her recover from the experience, which it did. The cousin in question later immigrated to Canada, got married and raised a family. Not long ago, she became a proud grandmother when her daughter delivered a baby boy. Life force is inexorable.

Our stay in Mulungushi, Kabwe, did not last very long. The fact is I have always been a bird of passage without staying in any one place for long. This has had its flipside in as far as I have not been able to develop the necessary social skills to make enduring social relationships and enrich my social life. Am I being too hard on myself? Put beside my wife’s natural gift for making friends, I have always found myself wanting. And her ribbing me for my standoffishness in company has been a source of secret discomfiture to me. I wouldn’t publicly admit it, though. Thankfully for me, the scope for social life in Kabwe was rather limited.

Malayalee expatriates are generally a clannish lot and would find something in common to keep them engaged in social and cultural activities. In Kabwe, however, numbers did not warrant setting up anything like a Kerala cultural society as the one that Lusaka had at that time under the name of the *Kerala Kalaa Mandalam*. Those in our circle of acquaintances in Kabwe found the local Anglican Church a social meeting point on Sundays. Each time after the service was over, they would stay back for tea and snacks and a chinwag in the parish hall. Then they would all repair to one of the houses and play gin rummy.

Then there was the Hindu Hall in Kabwe that showed Indian films once in a while and held Bingo sessions. The women in particular enjoyed those diversions. I remember once, the Hindu Hall had even staged a wrestling tournament. With their make-believe double nelsons and aeroplane spins and their knee-drops and what not that the so-called World Wrestling Federation re-enacted *ad infinitum* everywhere they went, they bamboozled the poor suckers, mostly men, who would come in their hundreds to mistake ersatz blood for the real thing with a willing suspension of disbelief that beggared description. Capsules of ketchup kept hidden in the mouth of a contestant would be crushed between the teeth and the contents let out through the sides of the mouth to create a viscous visual impact as they ‘lose’ the contest by falls, submissions or knockouts.

Visiting friends was another way of spending free time. Bobby Korah and his wife Kunjamma were among the few friends we liked to visit from time to time. The Korahs never failed to return the compliment. Bobby was a soft-spoken gentleman as to the manner born. He is settled in Kottayam now and we do occasionally run into each other either at a wedding or a funeral, both of those being occasions that Malayalees generally use for a bit of catching up along with sharing ostensibly the joy or the sorrow as each occasion demanded.

Another family that we exchanged visits with was that of Dr. Joy Cherian. He also happened to be Ammu's cousin. Joy was an impressionable young man who was easy to influence and he wore his heart on his sleeve. For a while he had kept aloof from us based on hearsay about my having something of a wandering eye. Happily, that distance did not last too long. His wife Valsa was somewhat of a gushing chatterbox who hit it off with Ammu from the word 'go'.

We had always tried to maintain a friendly relationship with Thampy and Jolly since they had been instrumental in our coming to Zambia. But that was soured somewhat if only for a short while in the wake of the gin rummy incident that had put someone close to him in the dock, which no doubt they knew had served the said offender right at the time but failed to admit. But that was only a passing if rather unhappy phase in our relations. We have remained good friends since.

There were three other Thampys and their families in Kabwe. They were occasional callers at Mulungushi and they were Kalonga Thampy so nicknamed because he was teaching at Kalonga School, 'Vickan' Thampy so called because he st-st-stammered and Kochu Thampy or Thampy Junior because he was the youngest of those who bore the moniker of Thampy. And then there was Dr. Oommen who was known to his friends as Sunny.

The frequency of visits exchanged between friends and the length of time you spend with each of them has a lot to do with what you may or may not be able to enjoy in each other's company. At least, that's how I looked at it. For instance, Vickan Thampy's speech impediment made it difficult for me to sustain an uninterrupted conversation with him without our feeling somewhat embarrassed. As to who would be embarrassed more, I was not sure. I would therefore make haste to leave after a few uneasy minutes of having tried to keep the conversation flow smoothly, the staggered flow of speech notwithstanding.

His wife Rohini on the other hand and my wife Ammu were two of a kind when it came to small talk. So, she would want us to stay longer although she would not say so in so many words. On one occasion, after we had been there a few minutes and I was already showing signs of unease, Bina our daughter wondered aloud why Rohini was not asking the customary question, 'What would you like to drink?' And Rohini shot back rather indelicately, *'ninte appente kundi onnurekette, aadhyam;* that is, 'Let your dad's bum settle more firmly in his seat, first'. *Touché!*

How my lack of finesse in relating to people was again exposed, in a rather unsubtle way, comes to mind. This happened in Lusaka. Tommy, an aeronautical engineer with

Zambian Airways at the time and a family friend, had learned quickly enough how as a visitor I was disposed to picking up a magazine or book that happened to be lying around and start reading it without so much as a 'by your leave' to the company present. Once when we rang his door bell, he opened the door to let us in, but turned right round without even a word of greeting, hastily gathered up all the reading material in the room and quickly bounded upstairs to return a moment later. Our quizzical glance in his direction prompted this straight-faced response from him, 'When you are ready to leave, Yoosuf, I shall let you take all those magazines with you'.

Again in Lusaka, on another occasion, when C. C. Abraham, another occasional friend, pulled up at our place, got out of the car and was about to come in when he realised that Ammu could hardly speak. She had been having a bad bout of laryngitis at the time. He went back to his car, got in and, as he was driving off, turned his head in our direction and said archly, 'I shall come back when Ammukutty's throat is well again'.

Your social skills gone rusty with disuse have a way of refurbishing themselves if you are in congenial company. The most frequent of our visitors to Mulungushi was Thomachen along with his family. And every time we went to Kabwe for whatever reason, we never failed to call on them as I have already said. He was great fun to be with. And he has not lost his touch to this day. He has the gift of the gab and in verbal sparring he could give as good as he got. At the same time he has a self-deprecating sense of humour that lets him laugh at jokes at his expense. He is perhaps the only one whose friendship with me has endured. I know that is not saying much for my interpersonal relations. I suppose I have no way of undoing the quirk in my genes. Ammu enjoyed their visits immensely, for whenever she got together with Chellamma there was no knowing when their chatter would end. Bina too enjoyed these visits. Anita and Bina were playmates and remained so until Bina started school.

Bina had gone off to the Dominican Convent, which she did not exactly take to as, one might say, a duck would to water. Of course, she enjoyed the swimming pool there. She also remembers the excitement the children had for the Easter Egg Hunt, which was all too brief. These redeeming moments, however, did not quite compensate for her dislike for a boarding school for one as young as she was. She could not hit it off with the sisters either, whom she thought were cold and distant in their attitude. It may well be, she had transferred to them the resentment she subconsciously bore us for our having sent her to a boarding school at a time when she would have liked to be in the bosom of the family so to speak. Perhaps she was too young to grasp that commuting to school every day from Mulungushi in the middle of nowhere was not an option at all.

The two years or so that she later spent as a day scholar at the Garneton Primary School in Kitwe was in refreshing contrast to her Kabwe spell away from home. She enthusiastically took part in all the activities at school. I remember her being one of the Magi in a Nativity Play that the school staged for the Christmas of 1975. Mr. Habanyama, the headmaster of the school was quite fond of Bina and was sorry to see one of his more lively pupils go when she did leave for Lovedale in 1976. Poppy Kalkat was her best friend in school and they were inseparable. Poppy was my colleague Inder Singh Kalkat's daughter. Kalkat was the physical director at the Copperbelt Secondary Teachers' College where I had moved by then. The Kalkats were our neighbours on the

campus. Mrs. Kalkat was Bina's class teacher at Garneton. Bina always commuted between home and Garneton in Mrs. Kalkat's car with Poppy beside her.

Garneton Common was also the place where the aficionados of Demolition Derby would gather without fail once or twice a year to have a bash at one another, not with their fists, which is a no-no in a society that played host to you, but in their jalopies until one car emerged a little less beaten up, after having wrecked the other cars out of recognition. To the barrel-chested, redneck Afrikaner farmers settled in Zambia, this was the one big idea of having fun. And all the while, their wives and children would be busy with their barbecues. They cook heaps and heaps of Boerewert (?) sausages and whatever and have a ball the whole day. Let me flit back to Kabwe again.

The Malayalee idea of having a good time is rather more restrained and less unself-conscious than that of the Boers. The visit of Alexander Mar Thoma, the Metropolitan of the Syrian Mar Thoma Church, to Kabwe was a nine days' wonder to those of us who had been starved of any excitement, staying as we were in a provincial town shorn of events. And Malayalees in Kabwe were falling over backwards in wanting to entertain the bishop during his stay in Kabwe. As the doyen of the Malayalees there, it was P. A. George alias Railway Thampy who quite willingly undertook to host the bishop during the two days he spent in Kabwe.

It was also he who drew up a roster showing who would entertain the bishop for a meal and when. As it happened, it fell to our lot to host him for lunch on the very same day that a reception had been arranged for the good bishop to meet the 'who's who' of Kabwe later that evening. There was nothing wrong with it on the face of it except that Ammu had also been asked to make huge amounts of a savoury snack –*parippu vada* –a savoury snack for the evening 'do'. Incidentally, it is made, to be precise, from soaked lentils coarsely ground and mixed with finely chopped chillies, shallots, ginger and curry leaves, and, salt having been added to taste, fistfuls of the resultant mix are then hand-pressed and shaped into round cakes before they are deep fried in oil. One can see how time-consuming it is to make it.

On any other day it would have been a cakewalk for her. When after lunch the bishop noticed how Ammu was still busy in the kitchen, he enquired why and was rather upset to learn that she had been 'burdened' with a double chore on his account. And later he made it a point to express his disappointment with the organisers of the reception for their thoughtlessness. They had no answer to this expression of mild reproof. It is a measure of the man's sense of fairness that he should feel unhappy that Ammu had been unfairly put upon because of him, even in a matter as trivial as this.

We saw another side of his character later on when it was our turn to put him up for a night during his second visit to Zambia. That he did not allow himself even a modicum of creature comforts in his self-imposed Spartan life came as a revelation to us. It is not as if bishops in general are role models for renouncing worldly life! We were in Kitwe at that time and we had got our guest bedroom ready for him with a 'deluxe' mattress for him to sleep on. The next morning when we took his bed coffee in, what do we see but the poor man with his arms between his knees wound up foetal fashion on the counterpane spread on the floor! And the bed hadn't been slept in!

It could well be, it was this ascetic side of the man that was of a piece with his aloofness at times. Or perhaps his busy pastoral preoccupations might not have offered him opportunities to meet and mingle with everybody with ease at all times. He would, however, always gladly 'suffer children to come unto' him no matter how busy he was. With the laity, however, he was seen to maintain a certain reserve, which was a reflection of his introverted nature.

This brings me to another bishop, the much-reviled Roman Catholic Archbishop of Zambia, Immanuel Milingo. Reviled by the Church, that is. In sharp contrast to the said Bishop Alexander, Bishop Milingo was an outgoing churchman and a great crowd puller. It was his penchant for faith healing that brought people from far and near to meet and interact with him. This obviously flew in the face of Catholic orthodoxy and that made him *persona non grata* in the eyes of the Church. The Pope promptly summoned him to the Vatican, issued an interdict preventing him from giving the Sacrament, and relegated him to a sinecure in the Church bureaucracy.

The next thing we knew, to the great consternation of the Church he broke his vow of celibacy and married a Korean girl, a Moonie no less, claiming that the church had no business interfering with what God had intended for him. The story goes that Rome rusticated him and sent him to a remote monastery somewhere up in the mountains of Italy to do penance, from where he is said to have escaped while the guarding nuns were having their siesta and made his way back to Zambia. Since the Roman Catholic Church does not defrock its bishops, he continues to be within the fold and holding forth against celibacy. His wife had been compelled to leave him when the Church had kept him incommunicado. If the Church could suffer the latter-day Catholic charismatics gladly, then how much more a faith-healer, who is but a step ahead of them?

Just as outgoing as Bishop Milingo, but certainly not as joyfully earthy as he, was my colleague of yore, the Italian American Jesuit who went by the name of Ugo Nacciarone. He was a man of many parts. Of average height, he had a scholarly bearing which was enhanced by his bespectacled face that sat impassively under a well-groomed salt and pepper thatch, except when on occasions he would give the hint of a smile and then heartily break into a guffaw if sufficiently enthused by whatever stimulated the smile in the first place. His sartorial preference for the chequered lumberjack shirts and jeans or chinos that he customarily chose to wear looked rather out of character for a cleric like him, on whom the sombre cassock that clergymen wore would have been more in character. Then again, he might well have been the exception to that rule. His ruggedly handsome Latin looks might have argued a fiery Latin temperament lying hidden under that calm exterior. However, every time you interacted with him, you invariably came away with the impression that he was a man of equable temper that sat well on his scholarly shoulders. Maybe, his Jesuit training would have helped to round off his rough Latin edges. And as a good conversationalist, he made friends easily.

He was on the Mathematics faculty at the Copperbelt Secondary Teachers' Training College in Kitwe, where I was posted in 1975 to head the Department of English. He was also a keen amateur astronomer, who was often seen during cloudless nights gazing at the stars from vantage points on the campus through his portable telescope complete with its three-legged stand. If teaching Mathematics was his chosen profession, astronomy was

indubitably his passion. He had a special knack for getting others interested in stargazing. Our sons Bobby and Bonny were so taken up with Ugo the pied piper that they were often a captive audience when he, transmogrified for the moment, eyes all lit up, enthusiastically expounded on a star in the distant firmament that he would make them take a peek at through his telescope.

Then there was John Suffolk, all of six foot two, with the slightest hint of a stoop and a lumbering gait. His blond hair was always sleeked down from left to right like Hitler's, but he was clean-shaven without the former's tell-tale toothbrush moustache to mar his longish but pleasant face. Like the Englishman that he was –he was from Bath- he had a special flair for the understatement. Quite a sociable person, John had a wide circle of friends cutting across all sections of people. When he courted, cohabited with and later married a Zambian girl, that too a divorcée with a child, it was to him the most natural thing to do as a gentleman. And he became Stephen's putative father and later along with his wife took the boy with him when he returned to England. He too was on the Maths faculty, but without Ugo's esoteric interest in the galaxies. Rather, his interest was in reading, reading widely and desultorily. He kept in touch with me for a while after he left. In fact, when he came back to Africa, this time to Zimbabwe to take up a position at the University of Harare, he did not forget to resume contact.

If John Suffolk was clean-shaven, the other Britons on the staff, David Evans and Jim Davies, chose to sport moustaches and sideburns, which was all the rage in the 70's. Like most Welshmen, they were both dark-haired. While Jim was short and chubby-faced and had a thick thatch which merged with his luxuriant whiskers somewhat like singer Elton John's, David was of average height and had a somewhat thin mop that revealed a fast receding forehead, like Sean Connery's in his prime, on a face just as masculine and handsome. Like John Suffolk, they were both likeable and were great company which belied the brooding image of the stereotypical celluloid Welsh *a la* Richard Burton. Jim, in particular, had managed to break through my defences and break the ice first. Many were the times when we would have tête-à-têtes on a wide-range of subjects of topical interest, during our free hours from teaching. When I left for Lusaka in 1977, I remember his giving me a copy of "The New Oxford Book of English Verse" as a parting gift and inscribed in it was the message, 'Best wishes for the future, Yusuf. It's been a pleasure knowing you. Jim Davies CSTC 1977'. I still randomly dip into that anthology on the rare occasions that poetry takes my desultory fancy.

Ole Kappelgaard the Dane was another colleague. Our two quarters were cheek by jowl. He was our in-your-face neighbour as our two front doors confronted each other leaving us virtually no room for an arm's-length comfort zone between us, figuratively speaking. He spoke good English but with the slightest hint of a Scandinavian accent. If I were to take a blind etymological guess, and I may well be groping in the dark, his surname might conceivably reflect a genealogy that extends back to chapel wardens, but there was nothing remotely churchy about our man. If anything, he was an agnostic. Tall, lean and handsome with a rakish look, he could pass off as a stereotypical celluloid hatchet man with his dark glasses, French beard and shaggy mane. But as the cliché goes, appearances can be deceptive. He too became a friend. His main claim to our attention, however, was his fondness for good food and the frequency with which he descended on us with a hail-

fellow-well-met grin on his face. Ammu remembers his having wolfed down on one occasion a whole bottle of pickled Kapenta (a tiny fish native to Lake Tanganyika somewhat like your anchovies) at one 'go'.

I must mention in passing that Ammu is on the whole a great cook and she cooks delicious breakfast staples like the South Indian *Appam*, *Puttu*, *Dosa*, *Idli*, *Uppumaa*, you name it. Did I say *Uppumaa*? Well, as to which of our two versions of this semolina-based sautéed savoury, rather like the Moroccan *Couscous*, is tastier has been a bone of contention between us. Even to this day.

There was a period when she was called away to India to take care of my parents and had to leave me to fend for myself, but only after I had run out of all the pre-packed meals that she had stuffed in the freezer. That was what dragged me into the kitchen, willy-nilly, to take up the challenge of cooking. Whereas cooking was serious business to Ammu, I could only dabble at best. My initial assays at this arcane art proved to be burnt offerings to the gods. I therefore wisely took the line of least resistance and chose the simplest fare to prepare for the table. And, Uppumaa seemed to be the most compliant to yield its secrets to me quickly enough and to become my main sustenance until her return, desperately longed for.

It was too on one of those lonely days that I played host to my friend Thankachen who barged in unexpectedly, his wife Lizziaamma in tow. You may have guessed, quite rightly too, that I cooked Uppumaa for the occasion. I also rustled up a chicken concoction to go with it, rather grandly called Maryland Chicken no less, having earlier sourced its recipe straight out of a cookbook that happened to be lying around unnoticed until that providential moment. No prizes for guessing how the attempted dish turned out. This has since given my friends ammunition to take pot-shots at my culinary misadventures. Me, me and more self-deprecating me! Let me quickly get back to Ammu's gastronomic offerings, fit for the gods, most of the time if not always. If her attempts occasionally failed, I have a sneaking suspicion that it was deliberately intended to avert an Evil Eye.

Her cooking is nothing if not eclectic. She is an avid practitioner of all styles of cooking. She can make a good Iraqi dolma, having been tutored in that art under my mother. That goes for her sautéed lentil and rice emulsion much like porridge which we may call *Parippu kanji* in Malayalam. The Syrian Christian variety of chicken or mutton stews and her fish 'mollies', both cooked in virgin coconut milk, are my favourites. Her own mother, a wonderful cook in her time, was her preceptor when she was still a spinster. Ammu's meat samoosas too always turn out crisp and delicious. And eating them always took my mind back without fail to my Dar-es- Salaam days and the samoosas that the Cosy Café and the Naaz Restaurant unfailingly conjured up for their patrons.

I might add even at the risk of sounding immodest that it was yours truly who initiated her into the art of making samoosas. I must confess, though, that I had had a little bit of prior coaching from my erstwhile colleague Roshan Ali, who combined his pedagogical pursuits with a weakness for making hors-d'oeuvres to go with his evening cuppa. But that's another story. She is quite a wizard too with pickling meat or fish or vegetables. Even cookbook aficionados will have to defer to her in the esoteric art of getting your

pickles just right, I dare say. To this day, wherever she may be, she has never missed watching TV cookery shows, whether by celebrity chefs or by cookbook writers. It is life-long learning for her, experimenting and experimenting. You win some, you lose some.

Her fish curry of the 'red' variety, for example, could be a hit or a miss depending upon whether her not always obedient 'salt' and 'chilli' buds did her bidding or be wayward. Her home-made sweet wine laced with cinnamon and what have you has been fancied by many although I find it a teeny bit cloying, not to say intrusively spicy, for my palate. She makes an excellent cup of coffee, but coffee has not exactly been my 'cup of tea' as a hot beverage. Alas, she has yet to get to grips with making a cup of tea the typical wayside-Indian-teashop way. That also goes for her yoghurt preparations like *kaachia moru* (seasoned buttermilk) and *pacha moru* (savoury buttermilk) although her yoghurt-based *pachadi* and *uppumaanga pachadi* (salted, mango-based pachadi) would hold their own in any competition. And my wife's Biriyaani (pilaf) is top notch, by any standards. In sum, 'much might be said on both sides'.

To her, cooking is not a chore but a sublime recreation. Strange as it might seem to any working mother, Ammu's penchant for spending her after-school hours in the kitchen, experimenting with new culinary creations or her readiness to cook large quantities of food on request for parties held by our friends wherever we had moved in our peripatetic professional life was a topic of discussion among women. That she spent the better part of the day in the kitchen may also have had something to do with my general disinclination to draw out a conversation unnecessarily. Add to that my withdrawing nature, and the picture of my reluctance to engage her in small talk is complete, I confess. What's her way out? Perhaps, sublimating her dismay at my reserve into culinary exertions?

The mention of Kappelgaard and his weakness for Kapenta had involuntarily sent me off at a tangent to bring up Ammu's love for cooking, especially Malayalee cooking, and to wax lyrical on her pickling skills. We had another Malayalee 'cook' on the campus in the person of Alice, a teacher of English by profession and the wife of Edwin Moses Prabhaakar my colleague. She could give Ammu a run for her money in cooking skills. Her forte was Malaysian and Chinese cooking, which was natural for someone like her who was born and brought up in Malaysia. Many were the times we had the great good fortune to enjoy her cooking, as the Edwins were our closest friends on the campus. They had three well-mannered children, a boy and two girls: Tarun, Tushar and Tamara. Tarun the boy and Tushar were soft-spoken and serious in their ways. Tamara the youngest was a bubbly, high-spirited girl whom our daughter found good company although Tamara was three years or so older than Bina who was eight at the time. When they migrated to New Zealand later, we were sorry to see them go. Ammu, in particular, missed Alice's company. Years later, I remember their calling on us at Kumbanad after our retirement while they were on vacation in India.

Another good friend on the campus was the elderly but the surprisingly sprightly Sherrie Doongajee, a Parsee lady from India. She was a petite spinster who wore her age well. She was, one could say, very well-preserved almost as though age could not wither her. Of course, it was known that she had retired as the principal of the Home Science College

at Chandigarh in Punjab. Her teaching spell in Zambia may have therefore been more a part of her regimen to keep exercising her faculties the best way she knew rather than to earn a living. That her zest for life continued undiminished was never made more apparent than when we met her in Jaipur three years later, this time occupying the principal's seat at the prestigious Maharani Gayatri Devi Public School for Girls. On that occasion she graciously took us out for a grand dinner at an old-palace-turned resort. I forget the name.

There was a certain motherly aura about her that endeared her to the young ones. She would fuss over the children on the campus and pamper them with little gifts that she always seemed to have in ready stock at her residence when they called on her, which was often. She loved flowers and the garden she tended in her front yard was the envy of many a wannabe horticulturist on the campus. She was also a good conversationalist and Ammu liked her the more for it. As a good hostess she would sometimes cook Parsee dishes when she entertained. We remember her most of all, and that fondly, for interceding on our behalf to get our son Bonny a place for his undergraduate studies at the prestigious Faculty of Commerce of the Panjab University, long after their admissions had been closed. That he rather foolishly –so we thought anyway- did not avail himself of that opportunity to our great chagrin is neither here nor there.

The other lady on the faculty was a snooty, forty-something spinster from India in the person of a Ms. Allappa whose first name escapes me now. Square-jawed and tall, she could look down her nose at the likes of those she considered to be beneath her to hobnob with, and that excluded almost no one on the faculty. She kept herself to herself except at the time of staff meetings when she was on occasions heard pontificating on matters academic and willed others, not so much by her words as by her demeanour, to defer to her views lest we forgot that she was the head of Educational Psychology, the bedrock of pedagogy. She thought it was *infra dig* to socialise with the rest of us. With her McGill University credentials, she gave the impression that she was a cut above her colleagues. We were not exactly Ivy League in her eyes. Her office faced mine just across the corridor. Whereas my door was mostly kept open during the mornings barring none from coming in, hers always remained forbiddingly closed. It was so off-putting to those who maintained an open-door policy. The only sign that she was in was when one would hear a stentorian 'Enter!' in her strident tone, in response to a student's tentative knock at her door. Her one saving grace was her sartorial taste. With her sleeveless blouses to go with her elegant sarees on her lean figure, but otherwise well-endowed, she was always well turned out; to give the devil her due. I confess I wasn't exactly a fan of hers.

Our principal R. C. B. Sibisi was a portly gentleman whose social skills were in happy contrast to those of the uppity lady from McGill. He mingled with all his colleagues freely and was quite a party animal. He never missed an opportunity to rub shoulders with the staff and the students alike with a *joie de vivre* that belied his advancing years. On special occasions such as Independence Day, he would eagerly step in with the students when they performed, complete with assegais and shields, tribal war dances that rumbled the ground on which they stomped with joyous abandon. He was a Zulu, no less, from South Africa and a distinguished product of Fort Hare University College. For South Africans, it was like Oxford and Cambridge and Harvard all rolled in one. We had

developed a good rapport between us soon after I joined the college, which came in handy when I needed a reference to apply for a position with the United Nations two years after I had joined the college. He gave me a glowing testimonial, which must well have weighed heavily in my favour in the UN offering the job to me.

Looking back, I feel that the experience I had gained in using the newly-installed language laboratory at the teachers' college for remedial work in communicative English was also a factor that landed me the UN job. Indeed, that had given me the hands-on experience I needed, sitting at a master console, to monitor the speaking skills of the trainees and take them along over their headphones, either one on one or in conference mode. This experience was invaluable when I had the use of language labs later, first at the UN Institute for Namibia in Lusaka and later still at the King Saud University in Riyadh to deal largely with the phonological and morphological errors the students were wont to make. At the Copperbelt Secondary Teachers' College, I distinctly remember, the source materials were Books 1 and 2 of 'Speaking English' by John Wright and the audio cassettes that went with the books to give the students oral proficiency.

That brings to mind an occasion when Bina, our daughter, had the cheek to correct her mother when she pronounced a certain word wrongly. The word in question was 'egg' and Bina was hardly eight at the time. Curiously, many South Indians tend to pronounce words such as 'egg' and 'every' with an intrusive initial 'y' sound so that the words would sound like 'yeg' instead of 'eg' and 'yeveri' instead of 'evri'. And Ammu was no exception. Apparently, my efforts at smoothing the rough edges of her English over all those trying years had not fully rubbed off on her, but, instead, had ended in our rubbing each other up every time I assayed a correction.

Bina, Ammu and I were making our way to the Kitwe market one day when two of the teacher trainees going shopping downtown thumbed a lift with us. As we were on our way, Ammu happened to mention among other things that she had run out of eggs. Predictably, she used the deviant pronunciation, whereupon Bina piped up and corrected her with a straight face, "Mother, that word does not start with a 'y'", which goes to show that even someone you gave birth to is not above a filial 'put down' to make you look foolish. I had tried to shush her but to no avail. To Ammu's great embarrassment, the students could be seen trying hard not to fall over with laughing. And Africans are generally great laughers.

Clearly, those students had for a moment failed to consider 'the beam that is in thine own eye' in involuntarily relishing Ammu's discomfiture, only to feel sheepish the very next moment for having reacted the way they did. Often, the non-native speakers of a language fail to discriminate between different speech sounds of that language and in articulating those are likely to transfer approximations from the first-language sounds they are accustomed to. To give a random example in this context, Southern African students of English often tend to insert an intrusive vowel sound between two successive consonants or after a final consonant as, for example, when they pronounce 'headmaster' as 'headimaster' or 'practice' as 'prakatis' or 'clothes' as 'clothis'. I remember once having intervened when a Namibian student, practising in the language lab, was caught saying: 'Isi smoking goodu for your helethi?' I had half a mind to chuckle heartily, but desisted.

But seriously, the obvious answer to his question would be ‘Of course not!’ But, does that message register in good time? Not by a long chalk! Human brain seems to be wired to flirt with danger in any form or shape. It took me twenty two years of heavy smoking, and of having to put up with every smoker’s bane of hemming and hawking that I could hardly shake off, before the cautionary message finally sunk in. I had turned forty by then. Sadly, I still bear the cross of that addiction in the shape of recurring dry cough and laryngitis, which, I’m afraid, ‘shall follow me all the days of my life’ my doctor tells me.

I distinctly remember the day I had decided to kick the habit, once and for all. It was some time in 1970 and we were in Lovedale at the time. My constantly clearing my throat had so disturbed our child Bina’s sleep, night after night, that Ammu was getting desperate by the hour with having to wake up every now and then to hush her back to sleep. Need I add that I was not getting enough sleep, either? On that fateful morning, I got out of bed rasping and gagging with a violent bout of coughing. The strain almost doubled me up. My throat ached, my ears hummed and with every heave of the dry cough there was a stab of pain between my ears and a surge of light that blew up in my eyes. I saw stars swimming all around. It was more than I could take.

I dragged myself downstairs; my mind made up, and I threw what was left of my stock of cigarettes into the trash can. And as an earnest of my resolve, the expensive Ronson lighter which my London friends had given me as a parting gift, engraved and all, I gave off to Kuppusaami the Sumeru House attendant. What had begun as the attempts of a growing-up boy to be ‘a regular guy’ and pretend to be ‘in the right set’ and what later was time after time tediously touted to be ‘this is my last fag’ routine, I finally realised I had had enough. I have never smoked again. And to prove to myself that I had what it takes to be constant in my self-denial, I would particularly seek out my smoker friends at social gatherings to test the threshold of my resolve to put behind me the twenty two years of self-indulgence that I had assiduously cultivated with more than a little help from some ‘friends’ and ‘dear ones’. It was not as if all that while I was not aware of that deprecatory definition of a smoker by that great English lexicographer

Chacha –that’s how I addressed my father-in-law like everyone else in his family- may have been one of those who encouraged my smoking habit, albeit unwittingly. Two days after my marriage to Ammu at her parish church, we went from my family home to hers, as was the custom, largely to be plied and pampered with goodies. Mark you; I was moving from a strictly ‘no-smoking zone’ to hitherto uncharted waters. And, guess what, the first gift that the son-in-law received from Ammu’s ‘old man’ was a box of cigars! You can well imagine how pleasantly surprised, nay secretly overjoyed, I was at the thought that I could openly indulge myself in this liberal milieu without feeling guilty. Was he showing me that he was not one of those stern, standoffish elders who would expect me to know where to draw the line?

When it was my turn to draw the line, with my children that is, I could hardly have been the kind of role model to have done it with conviction. Any stricture like “Don’t do as I do; do as I say” would have cut no ice with them for obvious reasons. Bonny was hardly five when he displayed early signs of what was yet to come. Without betraying any outward signs of self-consciousness, he had picked up a dried leaf from the courtyard, rolled it up and taken it to his lips with great deliberation, and pretended to drag on the

make-believe fag with great panache, even as he was pacing up and down in front of his other grandfather. Was he testing my father's threshold of patience? The only concession he might have made to my old man's sensibilities was not to have gone through the whole hog and strike a make-believe match to light the 'filthy weed'. Or, that might have been just his lack of experience. On being pulled up by my father, who was momentarily dumbfounded, Bonny said without batting an eyelid that his 'Appicha' –that's me- did it all the time. Of course, he could not sustain such studied innocence for too long.

Sure enough at senior school, he like Bobby and many others before him would skulk away during free time to smoke a furtive cigarette in the 'bogs', far from the prying eyes of their housemasters. Sometimes you overhear snippets of whispered exchanges about the goings on among their peers, often interesting but sometimes alarming and invariably revealing. Substance use was just a step away from 'fags'. If that was only a passing phase with an experimental drag or two on nothing more harmful than marijuana and not one that led to its serious abuse or, worse still, to that of hard drugs, then you as a parent would heave a sigh of relief that they have not had their brains addled. You might then conceivably let bygones be bygones, unless of course you are a self-righteous prig. Which I believe, I could not unctuously pretend to have been in front of my children without feeling positively ill at ease.

From their belated confessions I have since come to learn that they have had their experimentations with marijuana and their share of trips with other substances. How much of this had resulted in their inability to achieve their full potential educationally, I shall not hazard a guess about. After all, a part of that deficit might well have been a congenital manifestation.

When we were staying at 24 Milima Road, in the leafy Lusaka suburb of Woodlands, not far from the State House where Dr. Kaunda the President lived, our manservant happened to be a Zambian by name Hewitt Kabiinga. His compatriots would without fail call him 'Hewitti', by attaching the intrusive vowel sound instinctively to the end of the word. He, his wife and child were staying in the servant's quarters, only a shouting distance from where we were. He was a man of few words, a silent worker who occasionally appeared with eyes glazed and suspiciously stoned out of his head.

But we never tried to find out why, since he was a good worker and went about his chores totally ignoring the presence of others in the house. He would be heard humming a local tune under his breath especially when he was polishing our tiled floor with red oxide polish. With the two floor brushes he wore on his feet like slip-ons, he would first splay his feet wide at an obtuse angle like the clown in the circus and then bring the big toes together in a syncopated fashion to keep time with the tune that he hummed *sotto voce*. The floor would shine more and more, but not so his face. When we came to learn later from our sons, his one-time 'patrons', that Hewitt was also the local supplier of cannabis to his other regular customers, which included the soldiers at the State House, I could put two and two together but do nothing more than a helpless shake of the head.

Incidentally, a chance discovery once gave us cause to suspect that our daughter Bina too might have had her 'high' moments. This happened some years after our retirement in 1994. We were vacationing in London at the time in question and we happened to be

staying at her apartment on Kilburn Road, which she was sharing with a Caribbean colleague of hers in the Media. We knew her only as Marie. One day, when they were both away, Ammu felt rather peckish and on rummaging in the fridge found a cake and proceeded to eat it with relish without realising that it had been 'spiked' with what we later learned was cannabis sativa. For the rest of the day she felt woozy and fuddled and I could tell that both Bina and Marie appeared shamefaced for a day or two. To whom had that cake belonged? We thought of questioning Bina, but desisted. That Bina was not averse to a cigarette in those days, however, was pretty obvious from her tell-tale, nicotine-darkened lips. That's what her London stint had led to. Thankfully, they have all given up smoking since and, I venture to add, also given up using headier substances.

Whether we like it or not, drugs are here to stay. They frighten some, they fascinate others. And they each have their reasons. Incidentally Carlton Books in London published in 2000 the Agenda Series comprising four titles to set the record straight on drugs and 'contribute impartially to the debate'. Incidentally, Bina our daughter wrote two of those books and they were titled, 'Speed' and 'Ecstasy'. These books were a print-media sequel to the TV Channel 4 Documentary Series 'Rush' by Windfall Films, of which she was the associate producer. I can only say that the inferences I made –rightly or wrongly- about her pursuits which led to her writing these books could not have made me experience 'ecstasy' in the traditional sense of the term. Both the acquired meaning and the original meaning of the word, as we know, no doubt carry overtones of exhilaration which in excess bodes ill for the addict of either kind.

As does the word 'speed'; which, both denotes and connotes. Whether it was that of a sybarite on a psychedelic trip or that of a speed fiend on the make behind the wheel of an in-compliant machine that led to my cars being wrecked, my sons taking turns to do so, one followed by the other, I have not been able to ascertain to this day. It was a double whammy, nonetheless.

The first casualty was a Fiat 124 (Special) and the other was a BMW 518. And both carried diplomatic number plates by virtue of my UN job at Lusaka and that's what probably saved my sons from the wrath of the powers that be. First, Bobby got his friend John Alexander to drive my post-office-box red Fiat 124 Special into an unhelpful ditch. The Fiat was stolen not long after it was on the road again after extensive repairs and I was relieved no end, for it had comprehensive insurance cover. It was then that I bought the white BMW 518. And we had to travel down to Gabarone in Botswana to buy it; for by then cars in Zambia had become thin on the ground like snowflakes in summer.

It was now Bonny's turn to take out my BMW for an uncontrolled spin around the Woodlands Roundabout at the bottom end of Independence Avenue, where it met the top end of Milima Road, and succeeded in sideswiping an unsuspecting lamppost, to leave a large dent on his passenger side. Need I say that I picked up the tabs to get the cars repaired on both occasions in order not to lose my no-claim bonus on my insurance cover? Just before we left Zambia, the BMW too was disposed of.

Bonny's penchant for cocking a snook at parental injunctions had earlier been made evident when he upped and went away in the company of his friend Rama Iyengar and his girlfriend Joyce Owen on a sport fishing trip to Chirundu. Chirundu is a small

settlement along the Zambezi River at the border with Zimbabwe on the Great North Road. They stayed in a tent on a community campsite. With a boat and a helmsman on hire with fishing lines thrown in from the campsite, as I was to gather later, they sallied forth fishing on the great Zambezi. They had a huge catch, and as they tried to reel up the ones they hooked, each time the fish would thrash about around the boat until it was bludgeoned into submission and hauled in. They brought back a large number of huge catfish locally known as *Vundu* -some of them measuring as much as five feet in length, more or less. Ammu was away in India at that time and I was at a loss to know what I could do with what was left of Bonny's share of the catch after it was gutted and filleted and stuffed full to the top in the fridge-freezer and the deep-freeze. Finally, Bonny and I decided to send the remainder to other households. I remember our friend Thomachen's wife Lizzyamma pickling some of it and returning it to us in bottles. Uncharacteristically, another homemaker 'beneficiary' not known for her hospitality invited us for a 'fishy' lunch as an afterthought, but she shall for ever remain nameless. To cut to the chase, owing largely to this unexpected Piscean windfall, Bonny got off lightly with a mild ticking-off from me for having been late by a whole day!

Then there was the case of a Yankee back-packer on a shoe-string budget, complete with Bermuda shorts and flip-flops, who he brought home one evening as his guest without so much as a by your leave. This was strictly a 'no-no' with us. I did not immediately remonstrate with Bonny about the liberty he took, but the gatecrasher correctly sensed my feelings and left the next day quietly after thanking me for the hospitality. I felt rather sheepish when bidding him goodbye as a matter of form. Come to think of it, he seemed a harmless sort.

The thrill of flirting with danger often inspires youth to act rashly on the spur of the moment, and Bobby and his friends were no exception. And again, a car featured in this 'deed of derring-do'. This time round, his friend Derrick Samuel was behind the wheel of his own car, or was it Joe Owen's? Anyway, the three of them contrived to take a 'wrong' turn and drove straight into the tradesmen's entrance to the State House and came to a squealing stop before they reached the guardhouse at the rear; only to startle the presidential guards, who recovered soon enough to train their guns menacingly at the intruders. Needless to say, that gave the boys the fright of their lives! This time it might well have been Bobby's UN ID card as my dependant that saved him and his friends from charges of criminal trespass or worse. And that, only after they had tendered their abject apologies for the presumed error and had had a severe dressing-down garnished with the choicest expletives in both English and Nyanja from the Zambian guards as only they knew how to!

Incidentally, this happened at a time not long before Zimbabwe gained its independence from the illegal regime of Ian Smith. It was he who had earlier engineered the infamous Unilateral Declaration of Independence from Britain, whose prime minister, Margaret Thatcher no less, conveniently looked the other way. Later, it was largely owing to the sustained armed struggle of the freedom fighters belonging to both the ZANU-PF -the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front under the leadership of Robert Mugabe- and to ZAPU -the Zimbabwe African People's Union under the leadership of Joshua Nkomo- that Ian Smith in sheer desperation was compelled to go through the

motions of holding his version of ‘free’ elections. He then installed a cat’s-paw, Bishop Abel Muzorewa, as the prime minister of the re-christened Zimbabwe-Rhodesia and offered conditional amnesty to the freedom fighters. Both Mugabe and Nkomo refused to rise to the bait. Incidentally, Mugabe of the Mashona tribe and Nkomo of the Ndebele tribe were political rivals.

Since 1964, Zambia had been giving shelter to the freedom fighters of the Zimbabwe African People’s Union –ZAPU for short- under Joshua Nkomo who often made armed forays into Rhodesia from Zambia. His fighters were together known by the acronym ZIPRA for Zimbabwe Peoples African Revolutionary Army. In retaliation, the Rhodesian forces from time to time bombed and strafed their camps in Zambia where the refugees who had to flee their own homes were housed. In fact on one occasion, it was only by the skin of his teeth that Joshua Nkomo, who was housed in Zimbabwe House, Lusaka, escaped being killed. During all this strafing and the attempted assassination of Nkomo we were staying on Milima Road, uncomfortably close to the goings-on.

Earlier, in February 1979, a commercial Air Rhodesia Viscount had been brought down over Kariba by a Soviet Sam-7 missile. 54 people were killed. 10 of the 18 survivors were shot. Within a short span of time, they downed a second viscount. It was rumoured, rightly or wrongly, that Nkomo had chuckled with undisguised glee on hearing the news of what his guerrillas had done.

In retaliation, a few days before the Christmas of ’79, an operation code-named VODKA was launched by Ian Smith’s anti-terrorist commando unit, the SAS, and Selous Scouts. A convoy of seven Land Rovers painted in a Zambian camouflage pattern managed to travel over 50 or 60 miles, passing through Zambian checkpoints undetected, to shell Zimbabwe House and its precincts. The attack was synchronised with an air strike on a refugee camp elsewhere as a diversionary tactic. As I said Nkomo had managed to escape by a whisker, but scores of his followers were killed and many more wounded. This was only one of such retaliatory attacks on Zambian territory and therefore it was only natural that the Zambian soldiers on their part saw spooky shadows everywhere and were understandably edgy at the time of Bobby’s latest misadventure.

The mention of freedom fighters brings to mind my close association with the Namibian political and military entity fighting a liberation war, the South West Africa People’s Organisation, or SWAPO for short. From their refugee camps in Angola, they had made incursions into South West Africa to conduct a long drawn out struggle for freedom from the Afrikaner apartheid regime of South Africa. My association with them however was neither political nor military; perish the thought. It was purely academic –that of teaching English- although quite naturally by my anti-colonial orientation I could not but be sympathetic towards their struggle. That it proved a thankless exercise in futility is another story.

In 1884 the region then identified as South West Africa had been annexed by Germany, but was mandated by the League of Nations to South Africa in 1920 as a trust territory. South Africa virtually annexed it in 1949. Ignoring UN protests, South Africa continued to administer the territory defying international pressure. In 1976, South Africa, with the active connivance of the Namibian whites and the concurrence of Namibian traditional

authorities, namely the tribal chiefs, drew up a draft constitution for Namibia which was adopted by the Turnhalle Conference in March 1977. The intention was to grant the right of self-determination and independence, not to the putative Namibian nation as a whole, but, to the various ethnic groups of Namibia in order to pre-empt unity and balkanise the territory.

The UN Security Council as also the SWAPO rejected it out of hand. In the year before that, the UN had already started the United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN for short) with a view to training personnel for manning the civil service when Namibia would become independent, and had appointed as its director Hage Gottfried Geingob, a Namibian refugee educated in America and later employed at the UN Council for Namibia. (Incidentally, he later became the Prime Minister of Namibia at independence and later still was relieved of his position by the President Sam Nujoma.) The institute was located in Lusaka.

Even as the training progressed, the armed struggle for independence continued. Many promising young men among the trainees were tragically killed in action during their breaks from training, when they returned to their camps. (In that number I remember in particular Tshutheni Tshithigona, the very best student among the Namibian trainees whom I had the privilege of tutoring in English. Had he survived the struggle, I dare say he would have been an asset to the new nation and would have risen to great heights. Another student of mine, Ringo Abed, survived the struggle and rose to be the High Commissioner for Namibia in London. I remember meeting him several years later at the High Commission in London two weeks or so before he left London on transfer as the ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo.) Eventually a truce was reached in late 1988 between Angola, Cuba and South Africa and withdrawal of troops began. That was the prelude to the country gaining independence two years later.

Incidentally, Fidel Castro had earlier sent Cuban soldiers to Angola, at the request of the Angolan President Augustinho Neto (or, was it Joaquim Chissano?), to help the Angolans ward off the depredations in Angola by Jonas Savimbi's indigenous insurgents and, no less, those of the South African Defence Forces.

My association with the Namibians began in March 1977, when I was appointed Head of English Language Section at the Lusaka-based UNIN to teach English to the Namibian administrator trainees, all of whom were drawn from the various refugee camps of the Namibians in Angola and elsewhere in Africa, but not many of whom had the requisite academic attainment to cope with the curriculum, but of that, later.

The post had been advertised in the local newspapers, but it escaped my attention simply because I had not been given to scanning the advertisement columns. Since I had two years earlier been promoted to a departmental headship at a teacher training college, I was not contemplating a change of scene professionally. Then quite out of the blue, a young compatriot from Kumbanad, John Mathew alias Rajan with his wife Anu in tow, both of whom we were very close to socially but hadn't met for quite a while, buttonholed me at a shopping centre. Or, was it at the Kitwe Airport? Anyway, Rajan looked almost conspiratorial as though he wanted to let me in on a secret. There was urgency written all over his face. I asked him what the matter was, and he told me about

the advertisement that I hadn't seen. He was insistent that I applied for the post. The ad was over two weeks old and I wasn't even sure if I could meet the deadline for submitting the application and said as much to Rajan. But, he wouldn't hear of any excuses. That there was nothing to lose in trying was his response.

Prodded by Ammu, I sent an application and to my surprise I was called up for interview. Given a choice between teachers of Anglo-Saxon parentage and non-native speakers of the English language, Anglophone African employers generally tended to opt for the former when it came to appointing teachers of English. And, as it transpired, there were applicants of that ilk as well called up for the interview. Having taken the plunge, for two whole weeks after the interview, I was in an uncertain state of mind about the outcome although I had a feeling that I had not fared badly at all in front of that panel of interviewers. Their efforts to appear inscrutable were not particularly convincing. Then, to my great relief, along came the letter of appointment. Sadly, Rajan who had made this possible is no longer with us. He died of cardiac arrest some ten years later in the prime of his life.

My first day at the UN Institute for Namibia, on 1st March 1977, began with a meeting with the Director of the Institute, Hage Gottlieb Geingob. As I was ushered into his office by his Jamaican secretary Constance Tabor, he rose from his leather-upholstered chair, took off his tinted glasses, came round his glass-topped desk and strode half way down the carpeted floor before shaking hands with me and motioning me with a wave of his hand to one of the chairs to the right of his desk. He sported a beard, which was trimmed down to hug his face and to look fashionably stubbly. All of six-foot two with a crew-cut and an athletic build, notwithstanding the vaguest hint of a squint in the eye, he cut an imposing figure although one might have wondered how such a high office was borne by one so young. Could appearances be deceptive in this case? He was still in his thirties. Yet, he gave the impression that his position sat lightly on him. He wore a bespoke suit that showed off his figure to great advantage. He put back his dark glasses, resumed his seat and exchanged a few pleasantries with me before directing me to meet the Assistant Director and Head of the Social and Education Division of the Institute, Billy Modise, my immediate superior.

By contrast, as David to Goliath, Billy Modise was slightly built. His high cheek bones framed a sallow face that tapered to a pointed chin. His eyes looked too big for his face, and they bore into you through his round spectacles when he looked at you. He had gimlet eyes that didn't seem to miss anything. Did I see in those eyes the hint of a menace that lay within? Unlike the stereotypical African with his characteristic flared nostrils, this Xhosa African had a relatively sharp nose that reminded me of a ferret. He looked unassuming and was soft-spoken, but there was an aura of cool authority on the man. When he spoke, the edge in his voice told me that there was more to the man than met the eye.

Over the next seven years that I worked with him, I was to learn how true my reading of the man proved to be in more ways than one. As events later proved, he was often unnecessarily and sometimes unreasonably a stickler for paperwork and did not believe in delegating responsibilities, but like Emperor Frederick of Prussia wanted a finger in every pie. Or was it just that like many a man with his new found authority, he was over-

reaching himself? Our first meeting was short and business-like. He briefed me on the work that I would be involved in without getting down to the brass-tacks.

As I walked out of his office and into the passage, a notice-board on the opposite wall directly in front of me met my eyes. Out of curiosity, I stepped across to take a closer look. As I stood there scanning the notices, along came a Caucasian, who stopped and stood beside me and said 'Hello', to which I gave a perfunctory response even as he proceeded to scan the notice board. He then turned in my direction, smiled at me and made some remark, unsolicited, about one of the notices he had read. I immediately guessed he was an Englishman from the way he spoke. It was a bit unnerving to be thus accosted by a total stranger and I did not forget to tell him that I was at a disadvantage, but as soon as he had introduced himself I duly reciprocated. I forget his name now. It transpired that he was an English language specialist, one of a team contributed by the British Council to help the Institute with producing teaching materials. Could he have been told who I was before he approached me? It appeared rather odd that he persisted in engaging me in small talk even after we had lost interest in the notice board.

It then occurred to me that the pleasantries could be a ploy largely intended to size me up. At any other time I would have bridled at this not so subtle an attempt at what appeared to be an intrusion, but I desisted since I did not want to get off to an inauspicious start on my first day at the Institute. He must have been trying to ascertain how good this Indian's diction was for a teacher of English. When he confided to me later that my speech was free from the retroflexed articulation common among my compatriots, I knew I had guessed his earlier intention right. Cheeky! Some are past masters at the art of effortless condescension! Retroflexed articulation with the point of the tongue sliding backwards while producing speech sounds is a characteristic feature of speech among many South Asian speakers of English. So, did I measure up to his level of English?

What else was I to make of this episode, when his employers the British Council had earlier in 1969 let it be known to me that I could not be considered for an English teaching position under their auspices since I was not of Anglo-Saxon parentage? And this, mark you, after I had four years prior to that been interviewed and my name included in their English Language Teaching Register while I was marking time to leave London after doing TEFL under Bruce Pattison, Geoffrey Broughton, Jack Bruton *et al* at the University of London Institute of Education! But then again, I should have known that native speakers of English, or any language for that matter, labour under a shared illusion that non-native learners of their language could gain native-speaker insights neither into their figures of speech nor into the diction of that language, however hard they attempted to ape the turns of speech and make their obstinate organs of speech yield to the new speech sounds. Overcoming the negative transfers from their own language would be an arduous exercise with nary a chance of success. And the British, whether they are English, Welsh or Scottish, were no exception to this misconception.

If this was a forewarning of more of the same thing to come from the self-important custodians of their language, I was not at all sure how I could keep a straight face while having to disabuse them of their preconception. Wouldn't I feel like an unbroken horse being put through its English paces? In the event, the team soon left without anyone in that lot trying to break me in. In their place came Richard Chamberlain, a specialist for

producing teaching materials, on loan from the British Government on a more permanent basis. As for him, ‘much might be said on both sides’.

Initially, the only other person to teach English was an Afro-American lady by the name of Aminata Diallo *nee* Johnson from Pennsylvania. The three of us got off to a good start and worked as a team. Given the circumstances, it was an uphill task. We would generally have a brainstorming session when we were up against intractable pedagogical problems, of which there was no dearth given the kind of ‘raw material’ we had perforce to work with. It did not take us long to learn that we had in reality stepped into a pedagogical minefield. Over the next five years we were joined in dribs and drabs by five others: Messrs Black, Lewis and Elliot and Mesdames Victoria Findlay and Alice Butcher.

To this day, I cannot for the life of me believe how we managed to cope with a group of learners whose disparity in levels of competence in English ranged anything from that of near zero learners to that of elementary school leavers, with only a few who had seen secondary school. It was the questionable academic antecedents of these Namibian refugees that posed pedagogical problems to the instructors at UNIN. Mixed ability groupings caused difficulties in opting for an over-all approach in teaching, without often having to gravitate too quickly from one method to another, which would surely be a drag on the few better-endowed students in the class.

To make matters more difficult, the materials that had been prepared by the specialist were meant for teaching a homogeneous group of school leavers in a lockstep fashion to achieve hopefully in double quick time the target language required to grapple with the various core academic programmes ranging from management and development studies, through law and administration and health education, to history of Africa before they moved on in less than a year to more specialized disciplines like economics, comparative education and international law and what have you. Would Pidgin English fit the bill?

True, the entrants to the institute were supposed to have gained admission to the institute after having passed certain entrance tests including one in English. But the test papers were sent well in advance to and conveniently administered in SWAPO camps without members of the UNIN faculty being present to proctor the exams. The scripts were then sent by the camp supervisors to the Institute for marking, in the naive belief that the faculty at the institute would overlook the tell-tale signs in the scripts, with so many answers to objective-type questions being identical -script after script with the same wrong ones as well as the right ones- and identical compositions with the same errors creeping into one script after another. There could not have been a more obvious example of suppleness with scruples, let alone of the blind leading the blind, on the part of the ‘backroom boys’ there or whoever were the hidden hands that had given these entrants the heave-ho into UNIN and had willy-nilly thrown them headlong into the abstractions of higher learning only to find themselves from the start completely out of their depths.

Even British children need many years of learning their own language, both in formal and non-formal situations, before they are allowed to venture into higher education! When I brought this lack of preparedness of the prospective student to cope with the fare on offer, and by inference the lack of probity on the part of their handlers, to the attention of Hage

Geingob the Director, he was non-committal while I could imagine Nahas Angula the SWAPO Education Secretary gnashing his teeth in far-away Angola. I could guess that my words were not music to their ears. But, in the event, they kept their own counsel and bided their time lest they be accused of a knee-jerk reaction.

Some more time was to pass before I was convinced how SWAPO leadership closed ranks and would not allow its own record -in this matter as also, I was told, in matters regarding the running of the camps for the Namibian exiles in Angola and elsewhere- to be exposed to public scrutiny of any kind. Especially, they would not allow any form of social auditing about how their camps were run. Their practice was one of largely keeping the camp matters out of public gaze. Their public pronouncements, if any, were made with strategic ambiguity. Clearly, those who sat at the SWAPO High Table were fed on the Marxist fare of intransigence.

Even in later years, after SWAPO had managed to liberate Namibia, when some form of 'truth and reconciliation', *a la* Nelson Mandela and the Afrikaners, was called for between erstwhile Namibian political opponents, we have learned how the SWAPO leaders wielding power have held back the urge to make honourable amends for their alleged misdeeds. They have, instead, become tight-lipped about their past, hoping to lay the ghosts of the past to rest by efflux of time.

Of course, soon after I had joined UNIN, a Namibian colleague of mine, but of a different political persuasion from the SWAPO freedom fighters, had let it be known by dropping indirect hints how their leadership did not take kindly to any kind of criticism of its so-called Marxist praxis. He was a lecturer at UNIN, but predictably he did not enjoy security of tenure there because, for one, he could not see eye to eye with SWAPO on their treatment of non-SWAPO exiles and, for another, because he happened to belong to the 'other' Namibian party, SWANO, which had in 1976 gone along with the Turnhalle Alliance *vis-à-vis* the future political geography of South West Africa and therefore were seen as pandering to the wishes of the Namibian white minority proponents of divide and rule. He had lasted two years. His name was Festus Mundjua.

In spite of my instinctive urge for plain-speaking in professional matters, I managed to last seven years purely by dint of hard work and commitment, during which time I was upgraded from the UN P-2 scale to P-3 and at the end of 1982 the Management Committee had even decided to recommend to the Senate my name to take charge of a Modern Languages Division to be newly set up.

Professionally, my time there had been extremely rewarding in more ways than one. To begin with, it was certainly more than satisfying in pecuniary terms especially considering how the bulk of the pay-packet was in dollars, which could be externalized easily. And, apart from the onerous task of having to cope with a pedagogically no-win situation but in the process gaining new insights into teaching strategies, I had the good fortune to present professional papers at various international conferences and interact with the likes of linguists such as Peter Strevens, W.R. Lee, L. G. Alexander and others. One such conference was the week-long IATEFL Conference at the Goldsmiths' College, University of London, in December 1979.

It was there in a plenary session that I asked, tongue firmly in my cheek, the rhetorical question whether a Cockney from East London, for the only reason that he is a native speaker of English, would be a better teacher of English than, say, a trained non-native teacher of English from India. That brought the largely youthful house down. Young Anglo-Saxons are generally more forthright in their disapproval of official obfuscation.

Among the other luminaries I met at the conference, I was happy to have met again and renewed my acquaintance with Dr. Geoffrey Broughton of University of London my old guide and mentor at the Institute of Education.

Another conference was the week-long, 13th TESOL Convention in March 1983 held at two Toronto hotels, the Sheraton Centre and the Westin just across the street. Here I presented a paper on our experience in teaching English to the Namibian exiles, warts and all. And then there was the Commonwealth Secretariat Seminar in Lusaka in October 1983 at which I presented the same paper a second time but to a different audience to drive home the enormity of the challenge that we were up against. And that was when I came unstuck! That was in the second-half of October 1983 at the week-long Commonwealth Secretariat Seminar on 'English Language Programme for Namibians'.

In the course of presenting the paper, I had stressed upon, among the vast array of linguistic problems that speakers of Bantu languages faced, certain phonological and morphological problems as also the problems that they faced regarding the use of auxiliary verbs in English with special reference to tense and aspect. Even as I was doing that, to my utter amazement one of my former students had the audacity to interrupt me and question my statement. She was none other than Pendukeni Iivula-Kaulinge who had by then become an office bearer in the SWAPO Women's Council. I knew I was on firm ground, so I could sense that this had the makings of a set up. And sure enough, the moment I finished presenting the paper, Comrade Hage Gottlieb Geingob, as if on cue, entered a disclaimer questioning my *bona fides* in presenting this paper, which interestingly had had his official approval for presentation at the TESOL Convention in Toronto the year before. His disclaimer was followed by a rising decibel of protests from a number of the Namibians present at the seminar; most of whom I knew could hardly have held their own in English usage. If my memory serves me right, Nahas Angula was also in that audience. I had clearly stirred up a hornet's nest.

A week later, on the 3rd of November to be precise, the Director sent me an Inter Office Memorandum informing me that he was not considering further renewal of my contract which was to expire on 28th February, 1984. Of course, he did not forget to thank me for my services to the cause. How thoughtful! To be dealt with in such an off-hand fashion was, to say the least, unfair to someone who had served the institute for so long with such a strong sense of commitment.

The only Namibian on the faculty who felt that I was hard done by was Dr. Mose Penaani Tjitendero my mild-mannered colleague, the Namibian educationist. It is when the chips are down that you come to know who your well-wishers are. He commiserated with me and wished me well for the future. He had often been mildly critical of Billy Modise's rather intrusive man-management skills at the UNIN. Perhaps it was his strong Baha'i faith based on universal compassion that sprang from the belief that a common destiny

bound us all that set him apart from his uncompromisingly parochial compatriots and helped him to empathise with me. He suggested that I appealed to the senate against what I thought was the Director's arbitrariness. I took his advice and appealed. Incidentally, Mose is no more. He became the first Speaker of the Namibian Legislative Assembly and was the first one to be buried in the cemetery for Namibian National Heroes in Windhoek.

The director's response was to question my antecedents as a teacher by making invidious comparisons between my teaching ability and that of the teacher of Pitman's English at the Institute, of all people! By this lack of probity, he had succeeded in making the victim the villain of the piece. Clearly, he had conveniently misplaced his moral compass to serve his purpose. But, this misrepresentation did not in the least affect my self-assurance, borne out by an honest introspection, either then or later.

Looking back, the one mistake I had made was not to have registered my protest more forcefully against the prevailing policy of sending to the Institute, year after year, all comers to be trained as administrative officers, having picked them randomly from what was in the first place a largely lean crop, scraping the bottom of the barrel as it were, without any regard to the paucity of their academic antecedents to cope with their studies and acquire new skills. And after having failed with my half-hearted protests to make any impression on the powers-that-be, I should at least have had the courage of my convictions to put in my papers long before matters came to such a head. Alternatively, I should have kept my own counsel and, right from the outset, played along like a puppet on a string if only for self-preservation. Feigning ignorance of this questionable practice would have been safer than taking a principled stand. In the event, I fell between these two stools and paid the price.

In the latest fall out, Billy Modise kept his distance. It was not long before my fall from grace that I had on one occasion inadvertently opened the door to his office and rushed in on some matter that couldn't wait and most inconveniently found him in an intimate cuddle with his secretary. I had as quickly beaten a confused retreat although I was no prude to be shocked by what I saw. It therefore came as no surprise that he gave me a wide berth for days together after that.

And after my fall at the October Seminar, his simmering displeasure was made more obvious by his unfriendly attitude. It became even more evident when he not only failed to give me a testimonial on my 'separation from service' but even went to the extent of conniving with Hage Geingob at getting P. D. Lombe, the Chief Administration Officer, to cancel the farewell party for me that had been arranged as was customary when anyone left the Institute. That Billy Modise later rose to be a high-profile South African diplomat and later a shrewd businessman only goes to show that one need not be a model of probity to get to the top.

I must in passing mention an occasion when he called me into his office and gently chided me at my not having told him of my father's passing away. This was in March 1983. I tried to explain that it was my private grief and nobody else's. For that reason, to me, any show of sympathy would appear intrusive when one was trying on one's own to come to terms with it, but he would have none of it. He said no man was an island unto

himself and that it was not the done thing in his culture not to share one's sorrow with others. The introvert in me felt somewhat chastened when I heard that, but I had no way of knowing if this solicitude on his part was a charade. Anyway, after I was given the red slip not only was he in no mood to share my latest 'grief', but managed to keep me at arm's length.

My colleague Aminata Diallo too kept her distance, but on the last day of my work at the Institute she came to me and dutifully bade me goodbye. She did not forget to add that my departure was the uncanny sequel to a self-fulfilling prophesy. Was she attempting this as a sop to my troubled feelings? I looked at her quizzically, and she reminded me how I had often thought aloud and told her that as a maverick given to thinking independently I wouldn't last very long at the Institute. *Touché!*

Even my students took their cue from their SWAPO leaders and were less than warm towards me after it became known that I was leaving. This was certainly different from the earnestness and warmth with which they had earlier eagerly hanged on every word that left my lips. Of course, I surmised that they were keeping their distance from me as their handlers had ordained! One could see that the vagaries of their leaders would have had an impact on the collective psyche of the students. The leaders could make or break them. They were like putty in their hands.

Politics, among other things, is also the art of power-mongering. Power is often used to get people to do what they do not want to do. By and large, having risen from the ranks, politicians especially of the Marxist persuasion, have a score to settle with the Establishment for their having at one time been politically, socially or economically deprived. To such people, democracy is only a masquerade. Under that brittle veneer, they hide a vengeful streak characterised by intolerance of anyone who refuses to be subservient to them or might not see eye to eye with their way of doing things. To them, others become dispensable even when they had earlier put their shoulders to the wheel for a common cause. I was one such.

Paradoxically, *novo homos* though they started out as, but having since acquired a taste for power and having commensurately taken a fancy for the perks that go with their office, these politicians soon push themselves into an arrogant foreground. They now stay at the Ritz and shop at Harrods when they are out and about, so to speak. I remember an occasion when Hage Gottlieb Geingob himself intoning at a social get-together that Marxism did not preclude its practitioners from acquiring wealth. Needless to say, in contrast to these pseudo-proletarians, world history has thrown up leaders who, having abjured their gentle pedigrees and the claims that go with it, have devoted their lives to serving the people for the good of all.

A day or two before I was to leave, a Namibian colleague, Simon Iyambo I think it was, buttonholed me in the passage about my having fallen from grace and wondered how, in spite of this setback, I had not lost, as he put it, any of my customary jauntiness. I remember telling him something like how if my self-belief did not desert me, it did not matter what setbacks I had to suffer in my progress through life. Sure enough, barely three months after I left Lusaka, I was in Riyadh teaching English Language to Arab students at King Saud University.

Professionally it was a step up for me. Let me hasten to add, though, that my experience at the UNIN, and especially the international seminars I had actively participated in on their behalf and the papers I had presented in such forums as also the monograph that I had co-authored for the UNIN, did help me flaunt my credentials more effectively when I was interviewed in London for the Saudi Arabian post.

Socially, the time in Lusaka was extremely enjoyable. For one, by virtue of the diplomatic status that the faculty at the UN Institute enjoyed, like the rest of the faculty, I too was from time to time drawn into the cocktail circuit which was characteristic of the social scene in every capital city. Lusaka was no exception. The company you rubbed shoulders with was a cut above the pedestrian, the conversation always cultivated, the drinks on offer superior and the canapés toothsome. If there was the odd initiate in the room, it wouldn't be long before he was tactfully lent a hand, and by the end of the evening he would have had some of his rough edges smoothed off. To me these cocktails were an educational experience, having had the opportunity to hobnob with the who's who of Lusaka society.

And then there was the weekend Bridge sessions. Abraham Gee Varghese the chartered accountant, V. P. Singh the Indian diplomat, Stanley Moreira the trader and I would make up a foursome every Sunday afternoon. We would take turns at hosting the sessions. And, on the day, the lady of the house would ply us with a constant supply of snacks and beverages long into the sessions. Occasionally, rookie players like M.T. Thomas or Krishnan Nair would wait in the wings to play a rubber when one or more of the foursome took a breather.

Another pleasurable diversion was the Kerala Kalaa Mandalam, a cultural association for us the clannish Malayalees. All the functions were held at the Lusaka Hindu Hall. Apart from meeting and celebrating festivals such as Onam -the traditional harvest festival of Kerala- and Christmas with fun and games, the womenfolk prepared traditional feasts to top up the festivities. The men did what the men could do.

I remember on one occasion, I donned the costume of Mahaabali in all his royal accoutrements including his palm leaf parasol and his clodhoppers. He was the legendary king of Kerala who, as the tale goes, would come back from his exile in the netherworld once every year at Onam, usually falling in the month September, to visit his erstwhile subjects, much like Santa Claus at Christmas. We also staged Malayalam plays, one of which I distinctly remember because I directed it and played a part in it. It was the play "Layanam" by the celebrated Malayalam playwright Thoppil Bhaasi.

The rehearsals were always held at M. R. B. Nair's place. Coincidentally, MRB was known to his friends also as Bhaasi. Bhaasi, by virtue of his being a senior civil servant in the Zambian government, was the doyen of the Malayalee community in Lusaka. His presence and participation was therefore a given in any Malayalee social function, be it a wedding or a get-together of some kind, or sometimes even a funeral.

Once he felt obliged to undertake the riverside dispersal of the ashes of a Malayalee nurse who had earlier died and been cremated. But how was he to transport the ashes to the nearest river without having to answer inconvenient questions at the police check posts?

He asked me if I would help carry the pot containing the ashes, and also the left-over bones of the deceased that had defied the funeral pyre. According to Hindu custom, it was to be immersed by a close relative in the nearest river. I readily agreed to be the carrier. Bhaasi was no relative of the deceased but had undertaken to perform the funereal rites himself. He knew since my car with its diplomatic number plates would not be stopped for checking, for normally it would be waved through at police check points, he could avoid being questioned by the police who were usually given to checking, among other things, tyre-treads including those of the spare tyre in the car boot. Incidentally, if a matchstick would not sink fully into the tread, such a tyre would be condemned as bald and the owner of the car taken to task for it. I remember driving Bhaasi to Kafue River, ten miles away, with the ashes in the safety of my car boot, going past the ubiquitous police check points without being stopped.

This brings to mind an occasion when I was indeed stopped at a check point, allegedly for exceeding the speed limit on the highway. According to the Police I was found speeding in a radar trap as we were on our way from Lusaka to Kabwe to visit our friends there. That was just after I had joined the Institute and before I was allotted diplomatic number plates. I was not at all convinced that I had erred, so I refused to pay the prescribed fine on the spot for I had heard it said that the Traffic Police were often wont to foist charges of violation on innocent drivers to fill a pre-determined quota. Instead, I said I was prepared to contest their claim in a court of law whereupon they filled up a form and made me sign it with the implied threat that I would be summoned before a magistrate. In the event, nothing came of it.

On the whole, I would say my stint in Zambia was a mixed bag of experiences. In material terms it was good for, by the time we left Zambia after working there for twelve years, we were able to build a nest-egg that would see us through comfortably for the foreseeable future even if I were to go jobless. Socially, we had made a large number of friends. To be honest, I must confess that it was largely owing to my wife's social skills that we had so many friends. So, my enjoying the social milieu was rather more vicarious than personal. Of course, at a more personal level, the bridge sessions, the amateur theatricals, the games of tennis, and, last but not the least, visiting places of interest were all immensely enjoyable. Professionally, I was able to hobnob with the who's who among noted linguists and preceptors of the time and broaden my horizons, but my experience with the vagaries of politicians-turned-educationists who were the decision makers at UNIN, taught me a hard lesson that can best be summed up in the highly eminent advice of Sam Rayburn that well-known U.S. politician to his junior Democrat colleague Tip O'Neill: "If you want to get along, go along". I should have known better than to lock professional horns with unprofessional people.

Chapter Eight >>