A Peripatetic Life

The 'Expatriate' Experience



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JANET WILCOX

StoryTerrace

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For My Family.

A brief account of my complicated expatriate life.

This would never have been completed or even started without the input of my clever young ghostwriter.

Thank you Maddy.

J. Wilcox November 2022

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1. ORDINARY BEGINNINGS

My life has been a restless one, forever on the move, but it wasn't always this way. It wasn't always peripatetic.

I began this journey when I was thirteen years old, moving out to Kenya after my father, in a rare moment of ambition, got a job in the Colonial Service. Like many others, my family wanted to escape the grim conditions of post-war Britain, where the winters were hard and cold, food rationing was severe, and clothing and household utilities were in limited supply. Life lacked danger, but it also lacked colour and excitement in every sense.

Not much has been written about this strange life that so many of us lived through in the days when Britain ruled over nearly a quarter of the planet. We are now in a very different world. There have been many positive changes in areas such as medicine - a field I worked in for decades - but there is now far less understanding about what life was like back then. It needs to be described and explained before it disappears into history so that people might truly understand what it was like to live in the colonies before, following the institution of self-government in India and Pakistan, most others followed with the granting of independence eventually.

Things started out in a very normal way. I was born Janet Hogan in 1932 in Ilford, Essex, to a father, Jim, who worked as a civil engineer (first for a construction company and then for

the railways), and a mother, Marjorie, who was a primary school teacher. We lived in a rather typical semi-detached house in Sidcup, Kent. It was very suburban and the result of the huge building programme in the 1920s that came in the wake of the Great Depression.

I had ordinary childhood hobbies, like playing hopscotch or messing about in puddles with earthworms and other creepy crawlies with my friends in the garden. In the winter I liked reading the small yellow Rupert the Bear books and annuals that I got for Christmas. Life was very free and uncomplicated and I relished the independence that I had from a young age.

For instance, I went out on my bike with girls from school, sometimes staying over at their houses on weekends without any parents fussing over our whereabouts. During the war when my father worked for the railways (which were state-run in those days, including LNER, GW etc.) we went on holidays to the highlands of Scotland, taking our bikes and going on long expeditions. I wasn't so keen on climbing mountains with Mum and Dad, so I would stay at the bottom and read.

When I was very young I loved fairy stories but moved on to *Rupert the Bear* books. I also loved the Christmas annuals. As I got older, I liked school stories like Tom Brown's School Days and a particular favourite, *Angela Brazil*, which was very relatable when I was later sent to boarding school.

To begin with, I didn't mind not having siblings, but I got fed up with it as I got older. Like much that lay ahead of me, there was little choice in the matter. It may have been why I loved reading books - I suppose they helped me escape and encouraged self-reliance.

Primary school was unremarkable for the most part. Mum taught at the same school, which had an adverse effect on my popularity, but I still tried to be a reasonably compliant child and do what was expected of me. I could write good 'copperplate' between the lines, where we were given about an inch for the upper-case letters and an even smaller gap for the lower-case ones.

That wasn't an issue later on in secondary school, where you just learned to scribble like everyone else. Perhaps it was good training for being a doctor, a field where we all became notorious for having terrible handwriting! I disliked arithmetic, and I still remember the hollow feeling I used to get in my chest when the square paper would come out for us to write our sums on, as I was slow at adding up. I performed better later on, but maths has always been my Achilles' heel. Average teaching was poor at that time, particularly in maths. Proficiency in the numbers game has proved to be so important to me in later life, as I think it is for most young people.

Mum would often hassle me to do my homework, so there was no question of me ever coasting or taking the easy way out. I definitely wasn't a troublemaker or a rebel. What a pity!

Eventually, I transferred to Reigate Grammar School, where I stayed until we moved back to Kent in 1945. I really enjoyed Biology, English and History. When we were allowed to give up subjects I gave up Geography. Reading a good book on social history was so much more interesting than anything to do with geography!

Maths was still a 'turn-off,' always bringing with it that cold, clutching feeling in my chest. Teachers got impatient with me

because I was slow, poorly co-ordinated, and not good at games, which was easily my worst subject. School wasn't easy for anyone, but it was more bearable if you were athletic. Conversely, you were in big trouble if you couldn't catch a ball! It could colour your whole experience for the worse. It made me insecure as far as competitive sport was concerned but I just had to get on with it while at school while avoiding it in later life apart from swimming, which I loved, and the odd game of tennis.

Neither of my parents were particularly academic, but they were ambitious and fed up with life in post-war Britain. Having a practical outlook, they were looking for ways to improve their situation. Dad was half-Irish and had a wonderful sense of humour. We had a great if slightly detached relationship; he would help me out with my sums when I cried about how I couldn't do them, and would often read to me in my early childhood. He used to get more impatient with me if I bothered him when he was trying to read the paper, often while I was doing my early attempts at dressmaking. On complaining that I thought something made me look fat, he would just say 'well you are fat - now shut up!' I soon learned not to get upset, as there would have been no point.

Mum was more assertive and driven, and I think I felt respect rather than closeness to her in my early childhood. She was often the one who would push to make things happen, and Dad probably would not have even applied for the job in Kenya if she hadn't encouraged him. Dad had a 'laisser faire' attitude to life and needed prodding to make changes happen. Thus a big change in our lives took some

time to organise, what with initial research (pre- 'Google' days), applications, interviews, and so on.

Eventually, Dad was appointed as a civil engineer for the Kenya and Uganda Railways and Harbours (later the East African Railways and Harbours). The parents were delighted and I had no regrets; I was thirteen years old, restless, lonely and keen for some adventure! That was how our African life began.



1934, approx. Me and Dad on the beach on a day out, probably in Dymchurch.



1934-5 probably taken at Dymchurch (Kent coast). Me and my mother.



1934-5. Me on the steps to beach at Dymchurch, Kent.



1935 – Myself with my parents and maternal grandparents in the back entry to their house in Barking, Essex.



1940s. 'Hazelwood' Lee Street, Horley, Surrey. Our home (a mini smallholding) during the war.



1942-3. 'Hazelwood' garden, our wartime home. Me with Grandma, Grandad, and cat 'Minet'.

2. CHANGE ON THE WAY

The old prison cells where Mum and I spent our first night en route to Nairobi were cold and uncomfortable. This was our first experience of air travel without such essentials such as pressurised cabins The prison beds were hard and the walls dark and imposing. It was obviously disused long ago, but that didn't make us feel any less trapped. Not as many people travelled back then, so hotels were few and far between. We took whatever accommodation we could get.

Dad had moved first, in full pioneering mode. By the time we left he was already in Kenya, having lived there for six months, while Mum and I stayed behind to pack up and let the house, saying goodbye to our family and friends before flying out.

The journey was long, involving multiple layovers. The afore-mentioned prison was in Malta, our first stop before we got to Khartoum and Egypt, where we stayed overnight in the famous Shepheard's Hotel, destined to be destroyed by fire. My memories of Sudan and Egypt were of everywhere feeling hot and flyblown with large whirring fans. This was our first experience of tropical heat, with ceiling fans trying in vain to beat away the oppressive humidity. Air conditioning was non-existent in those days and would be for a long time yet.

That said, everything was so much brighter and more colourful in Egypt - a huge contrast to England. I loved exploring the Arab souks and buying my first pair of wedge heel sandals. The rest of the journey was a heady blur of sand,

heat, unfamiliar smells, flies and Europeans wearing khaki, and by the time we got to East Africa the excitement had worn off a bit. It was a journey of 'yells, bells and smells,' the bells being the muezzin bells calling the Muslim population to prayer.

Mum was very travel-sick and spent most of the journey with her head in a sick bag. The flight was bumpy and uncomfortable as there was no cabin pressurisation. So although I didn't fare much better, I had the resilience of youth and was ready for change and adventure.

Dad met us in chaotic conditions at Nairobi Airport. Thank goodness it was cooler, as it was the summer season, after 'the rains' and helped by being at 5000 feet. Settling down was difficult to begin with. When we finally reached Kijabe, a town about fifty miles north of Nairobi where Dad was based, we were relieved to be ending our long journey at last. It was even cooler at 6000 feet, on the edge of the Rift Valley.

We had not done any research on our new up-country home before starting out. So no wonder there was so much to take in!

However, we had to adjust to the reality of living in a few tents next to the railway line. There was no plumbing, electric lights or fresh water on tap. Water needed to be collected from a communal source. We slept on very simple camp beds in separate tents, with the heat and humming of insects constantly present. There was a 'long-drop' toilet at the end of a walk along a path through the bush, which could be terrifying to get to when you had to walk out there at night with a lantern. I was scared of close encounters with snakes, although I luckily never had. Huge oil drums of water for

baths and cooking were hoisted on stilts and heated by a fire lit by our houseboy (drawn from the local tribe, Kikuyu). It was all very basic. My mother was not amused!

For a while, I entertained myself while my parents adjusted to the culture shock of life in rural Kenya. Nairobi was relatively well-developed, but outside of the towns the roads and the housing were more basic. The roads were tarmac in the bigger towns only. Outside built-up areas and up country, the road surface was a reddish-coloured gravel called murrum, which rose up in clouds and often got into my nose. If you weren't careful it could cause long-term sinus problems, not to mention allergies. Arriving at a destination covered in red dust was a minor inconvenience, so the ubiquitous khaki attire made sense.

The local people, most of whom were Kikuyus, lived in round-roofed huts made of wattle and corrugated iron. Their dwellings were dotted between the many eucalyptus trees that covered the landscape. The local shops also had corrugated iron roofs, even though they were more rectangular in shape, all single storey designed to have big display sections where people could hawk their wares. Items for sale included maize, cooking stoves and pots, and bolts of brightly-coloured cotton for dressmaking. The African population were, at that time, held back by a limited education. They relied on a substantial expatriate workforce provided by Indians and Europeans, in the form of farmers and technicians, as well as the British Colonial administration to raise their standard of living. An important part of the education was provided by missionaries of various faiths who were important in school development, and still are.

Aside from exploring my surroundings, my hobbies were quite similar in Kenya to those in England: messing around, reading books and writing letters, even if my mother had to nag me to send any to my grandparents. I found it hard to motivate myself as I knew they would take weeks to arrive, and even longer to get a reply. Telegrams sent from the post office were quicker, but were only for emergencies.

Eventually, I was sent away to board at Kenya Girls' High School in Nairobi, where all the pupils were European settlers or white South Africans, both British and Afrikaner, from the big estates further west in the Highlands, up country. Tea and Coffee plantations provided exports that have now, in the 21st century, been taken over and further developed by the indigenous African population.

My experience as a boarder at school was disagreeable, to say the least. Yet there was no alternative. To begin with, my mother had to take me to visit the headmistress so that my school records from Britain could be inspected. The school decided to place me in the 4th form, which meant I would be held back by a year. After a term or two, I was promoted back up to the 5th form, slotting into a system that was based on the British one. It left me feeling frustrated but my eventual promotion cheered me up. It was all pretty dismal otherwise and my teenage status at the time did not help matters!

For one thing, the uniform was terrible, consisting of knee-length pleated grey shorts and white blouses that couldn't be tucked in neatly, replete with ties and grey velour hats of the pudding basin variety! As for the food … oh dear. At the campsite in Kijabe we enjoyed things that were not available in Britain due to rationing, like cream and custard and butter.

But at school, it was the standard stodge that they served at most schools the world over.

Life in Huxley House, the boarding house I was placed in, was highly regimented and controlled. We slept in beds arranged in rows in a wooden, army barracks-style building. The housemistress, Miss Dowdswell, lived in a room at the end of the building and made it very clear that we were not to get up to any mischief. Boarding was rarely fun for other reasons, as the girls from South Africa made me feel very different. Many were from grand families that had silverware and lots of servants and would make fun of me if I wore clothes they didn't recognise, such as vests. I had yet to develop a sense of humour, so life was pretty grim!

In turn, I found their accents very strange. I knew little about the history of South Africa in the 20th century. If I did, I would have known that there was no love lost between Britain and the Dutch settlers, known as Boers. The Boer war, where the British had notoriously placed rural Dutch settlers in concentration camps, had left deep feelings of bitterness that were still there a whole century later. Many Afrikaners had left South Africa for the fertile climes in the highlands to the northwest of Nairobi, particularly around the city of Eldoret. It was the sort of place where Brits and Boers drank in separate pubs and sent their children to separate schools.

The animosity from the girls who came from these families hung in the air like an unfamiliar spirit. I spent most of my first year being a sitting duck, at the butt of everyone's jokes but never quite sure why.

When I wasn't navigating this, once again I was trying to avoid playing games as I couldn't throw a ball to save my life. I

wasn't successful at either netball or hockey. There was such a high premium placed on athletics throughout my school career, as it was the gateway to respect and friendship from your peers. Hockey and lacrosse were treated with an almost religious level of reverence, and I was restricted to being a 'goalie', which meant I inevitably got the blame when the other team won. To add to this, we had to do PT, which involved jumping over boxes and wooden 'horses' with the aid of a springboard. I rarely made it to the mat on the other side, crashing down onto the top with a loud thud - the sort that echoed around the gym hall and the school. Everyone noticed! And of course, the situation was not helped by my porky build.

Things improved slightly after a term, when my parents moved to a two-bedroom government bungalow in Nairobi with far more 'mod cons.' My mum got a job teaching in a primary school for girls from Indian backgrounds, going on to become a headmistress, and I was able to continue as a day girl rather than a boarder, which meant I was able to meet different people and make more friends.

One of the day girls took pity on me, inviting me back to her large, fancy house for the weekend while I was still a boarder. A highlight of my school days was a dance with the nearby boys' school, The Prince of Wales or the 'Cabbage Patch,' more colloquially. Our school was described as the 'Heifferboma.' That was my first long-dress dance and my 'prom' dress was homemade, a pale blue voile number with puff sleeves. Not such a great success!

In general, life became more comfortable and satisfying. Outside of work and school we went to visit friends, and spent time in coffee shops (where I would drink Vimto, a sugary

purple drink that preceded Coca-Cola) and the cinema. In other words, they were the usual pursuits of people based in Kenya working for the Colonial Service, which were quite separate from the lives lived by the local population. Our centre of operations was in the European area rather than in shanty towns like Mathare and Soweto. This was necessary at that time due to the relatively poor education of the Africans compared with Europeans and Indians who filled most of the technical and construction positions.

Consequently, it was in these suburbs and the surrounding area that the Kikuyu tribe was located that the independence movement began. The local people bcame better educated, and began to organise themselves to form the independence movement, the Mau Mau. All over Africa the pressure for independence was happening in the 1950s and 60s. The European empire-builders found that running the territories had become too expensive in the long run. It was only a matter of time that colonial occupation, however benevolent, would come to an end with independence as the indigenous populations became better educated and capable of organising the process.

The colonial occupiers naturally put up a resistance to this and the British Army was called in to control the insurrection as it became more serious in the 1950s. Jomo Kenyatta, Tom M'Boya and Odinga Odinga, a Luo from western Kenya, were the prominent leaders and formed the first post-independence government in 1963. In the early years prior to independence, Kenyatta and M'Boya were interned and M'Boya, a charismatic leader, was to be assassinated in 1969.

This was all rumbling on in the background of my life and only made itself felt when I went to university, returning for the long vacations when the presence of the British Army was pretty obvious and provided plenty of company to any 'fancy-free' young ladies.

As the years went on, we as a family became more aware of this nascent independence movement, even though it was centred in Kikuyuland, outside Nairobi. Apart from the presence of the army, it didn't have any effect on our daily lives and, although it was history in the making, we gave it little attention.

Once we left Kijabe we didn't have much interaction with our surroundings in our day-to-day lives, although we could see the N'gong Hills from where we lived in Nairobi as a blue-grey presence in the distance. The landscape is much like the veldt in South Africa - you could see the odd giraffe when out on safari, but we didn't go out looking for game animals. This was only an attraction for tourists in Kenya in later decades.

That said, life was very different on the big estates up country, where people hung out in clubs for Europeans and seemed to lead very grand, but also very wild lives. They were the settler community that had made a significant contribution to the development of the country. The murder of the Duke of Erroll, as described in *WhiteMischief*, happened in the early 1940s, only a year or two before our arrival in Kenya. Years later when I saw the films *Out of Africa* and *White Mischief* they would remind me strongly of the atmosphere in Nairobi, all those years ago.



1946. Dad and I outside our tent, our first home in Kenya, before I went to school in Nairobi.



1946. My mother and I outside the shed - our early home in Kijabe, Kenya.



1948. Dad and I at Diani Beach Hotel, near Mombasa, Kenya. Holiday picture.



1948. Me in school uniform outside the house in Nairobi, Kenya.



1948. My mother and me ready for tennis.



1948. Our government PWD house in Nairobi. My parents' cars outside the house.

3. UNIVERSITY YEARS

Many doctors want people around them to believe there was a 'lightning-bolt moment' when they realised they were destined to practice medicine. That wasn't me.

True, I had a vague sense of wanting to help people, and I had always liked biology at school, even if I still struggled with chemistry and physics. I had performed well in biology and general science for my School Certificate, and as long as I matriculated I could apply for a place at university without sitting the exams for the Higher School Certificate. This might not have been the case before the war, but the residual chaos of that post-war period meant there was more flexibility in the system than there might have been, as far as university admissions were concerned.

The University of Witwatersrand in South Africa was my first choice, but my teachers at school recommended studying in Ireland at Trinity College Dublin as an alternative. The big move from Europe to Kenya only three years earlier had been an immense change. The thought of heading to another unfamiliar place so soon was intimidating, but going back to Europe at least meant keeping in touch with family and old friends.

So in 1949 at the age of 17, I found myself at Trinity College Dublin, studying for a preparatory year before properly starting out in medicine. This turned out to be the substitute for missing the Higher School Certificate, a system designed to

accommodate the veterans from the war whose tertiary education had been put on hold.

The first leg of my journey was on a ship called 'SS Modasa,' which took two weeks to get to Britain. I had to set off in August to ensure I arrived by September, the start of the Michaelmas term.

Leaving Mombasa was an emotional but liberating moment. Waving goodbye to my parents, I was conscious of the brand-new lipstick, Max Factor's Blue Red No. 1 brand, which I had smeared on in large quantities earlier in the day to celebrate. If my parents had any objections, then there was little they could do. They were not too worried as they were setting off on a long leave to the Far East, followed by Europe and finally to see my grandparents in England. My grandfather was already taking cardiac medication and we were conscious of that he might not have long to live.

Thankfully I wasn't alone on the journey. My friend Jenny and her sister were accompanying me, also with a view to studying in Europe. Our lower-deck cabin was small and poky, but we were too excited to really notice. The one serious source of discomfort was the lack of ventilation, which could only be eased by opening the porthole window. On the particularly languid, stuffy nights when we were travelling through the Suez Canal, opening the porthole didn't provide much relief. If anything, we risked waking up with a very stiff neck on account of having the fan on all night.

Things cooled down considerably when the ship moved into the Mediterranean, and the ship's officers adapted to the new climate by exchanging their tropical whites for navy blue uniforms. Port Said was a particular point of interest on the

way along the Suez Canal. The 'gully gully' men, or local Arab salesmen, had novelty items to attract the attention of us young girls. Brightly-coloured jewellery and clothes were laid out before us, prompting sighs of desire and delight as we craned our necks to see better from our limited vantage point on the upper deck.

Alas, although sorely tempted, we had limited funds to fritter away when the gully gully men sent specimens of their wares on long sticks to the upper decks for our inspection. My huge trunk, packed away in the hold, held some clothes for the upcoming cold winters and along with numerous bags of sugar for my grandparents, who would be temporarily relieved from the severe rationing that was still happening in the UK.

Unfortunately, the rigours of travel resulted in leakage from some of the bags. On arrival at the dock at Plymouth, a trail of sugar appeared every time my trunk was moved, to my embarrassment! At least some of it was salvaged for my grateful grandparents during the journey from Plymouth to Paddington, and then on to their home in Barking in Essex.

It was lovely to be back with Grandma and Grandad again after three years of communication only through letters. I stayed in the back bedroom of their semi-detached house which overlooked the railway line from Barking into London Bridge and Victoria. A particular treat was my grandmother's excellent cooking, which included stove-top stews and custard puddings cooked slowly in the oven, which ensured a perfectly 'set' texture. The thought of frequenting the big shops and cafes in London was exciting, but with my meagre income it was to remain a pipe dream. The only exception to this was

my decision to purchase a warm woollen coat for the chilly winter lying ahead of me.

When I eventually made my way to Ireland after a few weeks in Barking, I went to Liverpool via a 'Crosville' coach and then boarded a ferry to Dun Laoghaire. The overnight journey was mostly spent battling seasickness and the added queasiness from breathing in the beer fumes from the boat's saloon. There was another female student bound for Trinity and as we eventually got bored of watching the drunk men around us rolling empty beer bottles across the floor in the saloon, also full of cigarette fumes, and opted for sitting up on the freezing deck instead. An overnight berth was beyond our means as students. So we found the experience bracing, to say the least!

The lack of student grants in the post-war years meant that I had to rely on a small allowance from my parents. It would be topped up with student holiday jobs, but in my first term that was months away.

That first year at Trinity was tough as I had to cover a whole range of subjects, including maths, English, botany and zoology, followed by a raft of exams. In those days it was important to be good at arts subjects just as much as scientific ones, and it left us with little room to mess around.

Needless to say, it was hard going. Not that messing around would have been possible given that I was living on an allowance of £5 a week, my parents having agreed to pay my fees but not for much else. There was no going out to drink in pubs in the evenings as we lived in 'digs,' where the landlady expected us all to be in at a certain time of night and sit

around the table together for dinner. She didn't allow any nonsense like boozing and sleeping around.

Looking back, I think she had the right idea; some of the other boarders were ordinary working people which meant that I had the chance to live in the real world, a better deal than being limited only to student company while adjusting to adult life.

However, we did at least get to have lunch at the college or at a cafe in the city. It might have been different if I had gone to live in Dartry Hall, the official college residence for female students, but memories of boarding school were still strong. I feared halls would be as bad as that.

I soon regretted this decision. Initially, I was living in Rathfarnham, a suburb that was a considerable trek from the centre of Dublin. The bus trips to college were tedious but my eventual purchase of a bike made things far easier. When I shifted to the digs in Rathgar, a location much closer to the college, my commute was less difficult.

Unfortunately, the no-nonsense regime of Miss Schwarz, the German landlady, made life more restrictive. As well as communal eating and a ban on cavorting with men, we all had to do our laundry out in the backyard, on Saturday mornings, with no exceptions!

My sleeping arrangements were not the best. I shared a room with a girl who was studying for an English degree, who smoked excessively and slept very little. Our room was often a suffocating fug as she studied through the night, the glow of her cigarette illuminating the works of Middle English she was frantically reading. My needs were rarely considered, but I

had no option beyond lumping it. Attitude adjustment helped and I became almost as bad for doing late revision in bed.

Eventually, I moved into a flat share with another girl, and we would cook our meals on gas rings, the only kitchen facilities. No one worried much about fire safety in those days. Once I tried to cook a chicken in a biscuit tin in my boyfriend's primitive flat in college, where all he had was a bed, desk and a lamp, and a small bathroom! It goes without saying that it was not a success.

Digs and flat shares were our best option for socialising cheaply, as the college buildings were out of bounds to women after 10 pm in the evening. That kind of restriction didn't exist for the men, whom it seemed to me had so much more freedom! Unlike the girls, they were not expected to do their own laundry, and their primitive accommodation was at least supplemented by the 'skips,' or hired help that cleaned the rooms in a similar manner to those employed by the colleges at Oxford and Cambridge.

Yet for the most part, I didn't question it. After all, it was Ireland, a place with so many restrictions that Catholic students couldn't even attend Trinity without special dispensation.

Regardless, Dublin could still be a very fun city. We didn't drink booze but we went out for coffee and shopping and had picnics when we went for cycle rides out in the countryside. Glendalough and Powerscourt as well as coastal places such as Bray and Howth were easy to get to either by bus or bike, and I have fond memories of HB ice cream, something probably consigned to history by now. During the holidays I returned to my parents in Nairobi, and was glad for the

continuing link with Kenya, even if my first holiday was boringly spent cramming for my chemistry exams, which I had failed at the end of the year and would have to re-sit before the next year started. I knew that failure would hold me back, so I resigned myself to studying. Like many of my fellows, adjusting to independent study without the 'spoon-feeding' that came with school would take some time.

My holidays in college years would be spent doing a strange series of jobs. One of them was spent in the offices of the East African Tannin Extract Company. I never really found out what went on there, as I spent most of each day writing out cheques in long hand and adding up figures on an old-fashioned crank-handled machine. I spent my lunch breaks eating Ryvita and hard-boiled eggs in one of the nearby hotels. Anything more substantial would be deemed fattening. Hiding behind one of the many pot plants in the hope that no one would see me was a source of amusement.

There was some social life in the evenings and on Saturday afternoons through Scottish country dances and trips to the cinemas and milk bars, which were becoming increasingly popular. It was all so much more fun after the Mau Mau rebellion started, believe it or not, as there was a substantial contingent of British army men all looking for female company. Even my mother would sometimes come out to join me at the Scotch dancing sessions. By this time my parents had made the decision to cut their ties with England and remain in Kenya. My mother continued to teach while my father designed and maintained the deep-water berths in Kilindini Harbour over in Mombasa, and they converted part of a bungalow they had bought into four apartments which

were used for rental income. For the most part, they were settled and happy.

And yet within the next 15-20 years, they would have seen so many changes as Dad died suddenly at 56 and Mum's life changed overnight.

I did at least have a boyfriend during my time at Trinity, one of those renegade English Catholics who had managed to worm his way in! The odds were in your favour if you were a girl, as the men made up seventy-five per cent of the student body. The man I ended up with, Kit Higgins, was also studying medicine and lived in college rooms for the first year, where I would go and visit him. Perhaps the one stumbling block, at least at the beginning, was his faith.

My parents were not religious, and I'm still not sure if I was even baptised. I think this made me a bit of a heathen in the eyes of my boyfriend, as he attended mass every day. Dublin was a far more pious place back then, to the point where some churches had masses every half-hour. There was no shortage of priests and families felt honoured if one or more of their sons had the 'calling'. The only option for girls was to become a nun, more common out in the country than in the bigger towns and cities where there were more employment opportunities for girls.

Clearly, the devout air I was breathing had an effect. After three or four years I decided to take instruction and was baptised and confirmed as a Catholic. I chose Carmel as my confirmation name. I still have it.

That said, it was a practical choice more than anything. Kit made it clear that it would be necessary for me to convert if we were to ever get married, and even though we didn't stay

together I seemed throughout my life to keep ending up with Catholic partners. Ultimately, it didn't make me any more religious in a serious sense. I'm pragmatic by nature, and like my parents, I liked to just get on with things without overthinking or second-guessing myself.

My studies took up enough of my mental energy. Part of the first year of our training was the study of anatomy, pharmacology and physiology. This involved dissecting sections of old, preserved cadavers which we kept wrapped under damp towels, delving into the various parts to expose the muscles, and with more difficultly, the major nerves and blood vessels. Preservation can only go so far and the major parts, such as capillaries, microscopic nerves and the autonomic nervous system, were still invisible. These needed the use of a microscope.

We worked in groups of six, fumbling with rubber gloves and referring to greasy handbooks such as 'Cunningham's Anatomy' as we worked on the trunk and limbs first. The head and neck and brain were a secret reserved for the second year of medical school. Our efforts would be tested by the occasional 'spot exam,' where we would be asked to go around long tables and identify which small bones belonged on which side of the body. Of course, the anatomy bible was and still is 'Grey's Anatomy' and we all had our own copy, usually second or third-hand which needed much mental application, supplemented by numerous slides that required time spent with the microscopes. At least the heavy textbooks we brought could be sold at the end of the year. They were also useful to press pleats in skirts when laid on the floor overnight.

We had to get used to it, but it never stopped being pretty grim. At least the bodies rarely resembled anything close to a living being.

From the second and third years onwards we started seeing patients. It was very different from how things are now, where medical students start doing clinical work a lot sooner. We were all put in groups and sent to Dublin's various teaching hospitals to see real patients on ward rounds, often supervised by the most charismatic senior physicians and surgeons, and were quizzed on what we thought was the differential diagnosis. We were carefully taught how to take a history and the precise way to examine patients.

This was probably a bit unnerving for the poor patients whose beds we were grouped around, as we often talked about them as though they weren't there. We were under strict orders not to touch patients before obtaining the history. We were taught how to examine the skin covering a lump to make a judgment about what the colour and texture meant before even laying a finger on the patient. A lot of this is bypassed nowadays by shortcuts such as scans and biopsies and investigative radiology, which is where such huge advances have occurred in my lifetime.

My experiences at the city's two maternity hospitals were more 'hands-on.' Students were sent out in groups of four to go and attend live births taking place in the slum districts nearby. It was important that we carried bottles of Trilene – an anaesthetic - and Schimmelbuch masks so that we could carry out anaesthesia for difficult deliveries. All of us carried a threepenny piece to call the on-call clinical clerk at the hospital in case any exceptionally difficult cases cropped up –

which now and again they did. The clinical clerk would be a junior doctor in obstetrics and gynaecology.

These were the tools of our trade. They seem rudimentary nowadays, but they did the job. I might add that all this happened at the famous Rotunda Hospital and in the surrounding slum tenements in the northern part of the city such as Gardiner Street. The Mater Hospital was favoured by the students of UCD and the College of Surgeons.

In total, I was at Trinity for six years, having completed one year of pre-medical studies and five years of medical school. Once all that was over, I had a lot of big decisions ahead of me – including if and when I would start real work, get married, return to Africa, and have a completely different life.



1960s - me with my boyfriend (of 5 years) Kit on O'Connell Bridge in Dublin. Nelson's column seen in the background.



Me and my mother on holiday in Scandinavia.



Trinity College Dublin

4. NAIROBI AND BEYOND

It was 1955 and graduation time for most of us. This was not the case for Kit, who had been forced to stay behind in order to repeat a failed subject in the final year, which meant repeating an entire year of study.

Reluctantly, I decided to return to Kenya for a year before returning to England to join Kit and look forward to a joint future where we both worked as GPs, possibly on the Wirral near Liverpool where he was from. Yet I was starting to sense that we might not have much of a future left as I did not think I could ever be as devoted to the Catholic Church as Kit, and sensed that on that account alone, the marriage we contemplated might not be feasible.

So, it was only sensible to work my compulsory pre-registration year in Kenya and to be near my parents. After failing to secure a medical placement in the main teaching hospital in Nairobi for reasons that were frustratingly unclear, I started out on an alternative, making the long trip to Uganda to work in Malaga Hospital in Kampala, the main teaching hospital at Makerere University.

Journeys were always long and difficult in those days, and when I reached the hospital I found myself on a huge campus where, being the only female junior doctor, I was accommodated in a two-room 'flatlet' in the nursing sisters' house. It took between five and ten minutes to walk to the wards.

Most of the staff around me were nurses from Europe and healthcare assistants who were largely drawn from the local community. The hospital buildings didn't resemble the post-Victorian British or Irish institutions I had trained in at all. They were low-rise wood builds and contained around 350 beds in all. Much like the modern-day NHS in Britain, there were never quite enough beds to go around. We were under constant pressure to move patients on and bring in more high-priority ones, often before the previous ones were fit to be discharged. Floor cases were often fitted in between the beds.

I undertook six months of general medicine before I was placed with the obstetrics and gynaecology department. The conditions could be confusing and often difficult. I was exposed to the effects of a lot of tropical diseases that I had never seen in Ireland. They included malaria, which is endemic in East Africa, bilharzia, various strains of tuberculosis, and sickle cell anaemia, again widespread among black African populations. Women and children were particularly undernourished, which accounted for much chronic ill-health. I was on a steep learning curve and the need to work through interpreters did not make things any easier. Swahili was and still is the main language in East Africa, but there were many other unfamiliar local tribal languages, and I was 300 or 400 miles from the more familiar Kenyan Highlands.

The physical signs of endemic diseases were florid compared with what prevailed in Europe, such as enormous livers and spleens. Malaria was a huge problem and although sleeping nets were widely used by expatriate employees, they were not part of the local lifestyle.

Fortunately, in the 21st century, we can look forward to overcoming malaria with new developments in vaccines, even if years of testing for effectiveness, method of administration and cost would need to come first. Many people came in who had injured themselves while drunk on local spirits, plus the usual road traffic accidents and they were the ones who trusted us enough to even seek treatment. A majority relied solely on the local witch doctors or pivoted between them and the hospital. Most of the teaching I received came from senior doctors, other graduates from the nearby Makerere University and the occasional consultant from Europe. I often felt overwhelmed as it was an unfamiliar environment and there was a lot to learn.

My first exposure post-training to anaesthesia, which would later become my specialism, happened during my second stint. Women who were undergoing a caesarean section would be anaesthetised by having a lint mask placed over their faces and ethyl chloride and ether dripped through, just as we did when I was a medical student during deliveries with forceps. The Schimmelbusch mask is a feature of medical museums now, along with catgut sutures in a glass ampoule and glass syringes and needles which required sterilisation by boiling. Antisepsis was in the early stages of development, with autoclaves reserved for operating rooms.

The antenatal clinics were chaotic and crowded with large families gathering to support their pregnant family members. Births were also fraught with hazards as women often had smaller bodies due to malnutrition. Labour was frequently obstructed and surgical interventions such as caesarian

sections and the use of forceps were needed on an almost daily basis. Even then, many women didn't live through childbirth.

Communication with patients and their families, always at its most challenging in such moments, was made harder by the linguistic barrier, and we relied on healthcare assistants from the local population to help us translate. Formal consent for surgical interventions was time-consuming to obtain.

They were tough days, and I was often exhausted from working and studying to expand my skill set. My six months in obstetrics and gynaecology meant I never had a slow day at work. I took up smoking again, a habit first made possible in Ireland due to how cheap tobacco was. It was a craving I would nurse well into the 1960s until the cost of cigarettes became too prohibitive, along with the various public health warnings that preached loudly against its evils.

A positive development came along in the form of David Mallory, an English graduate and civil servant who worked in a junior position monitoring government finances for the Colonial Audit Department. He cut a very different figure from Kit. To begin with, David was more artistic and far less serious and religious. He had educated tastes, enjoying Shakespeare and classical music like Mozart and Bach, often regarding my enjoyment of the easy-listening greats like Glenn Miller and Frank Sinatra with disdain. The theatre was his whole life, and outside of work he aspired to be a producer, getting very involved in the ex-pat amateur dramatics scene.

This broadened my cultural horizons, even though I felt guilty about how little of the theatre scene in Dublin, particularly the works of Sean O'Casey and Oscar Wilde, I

had taken in while I was a student. I still prefer thrillers and spy stories over reading or watching any of 'the classics' today.

I wasn't always so keen on this at first, a sentiment that my family shared, calling him 'artsy fartsy' whenever they expressed an opinion of him. The feeling was mutual on his side, and for my part, I disliked his mother when I first met her, seeing her as too critical of my domestic skills.

In later years after our return to England, I became dependent on her help on the 'home front' of parenthood when I started work as a junior doctor. Nonetheless, we got married in August 1955, in the Makerere University Chapel in Kampala. David was able to rent his suit, but the process of finding suitable wedding attire was not so simple for me. My dress had to be made of brocade by local south Asian tailors, which thankfully proved to be a good investment, as it was re-used many times over the next decade whenever I had to attend any formal, long-dress functions.

It was the usual tasteful wedding colour of cream-white. However, it was slightly marred when someone stubbed their cigarette out on my dress the night before the wedding, leaving me with the prospect of walking down the aisle with a hole burned right through it! Thankfully the many folds it contained obscured the damage for long enough. It wasn't even a particularly raucous pre-wedding night. Stag and hen parties were not really a convention back then, so I simply had a group of female friends around for some drinks.

Pre-wedding mishaps aside, it was a lovely ceremony with a reception held afterwards at the house of David's boss, the Director of Audit, and his wife. The gardens were lovely and all in all, it was a pleasant day, with my parents in attendance,

even if the trip was too far for David's family in England.to make the journey.

We honeymooned in Mombasa at the Nyali Beach Hotel, which still operates in the 21st century. I changed into a slightly more informal beige 'going away' dress, but with some high-heeled shoes and a fairly expensive leather handbag. To current-day eyes it would probably seem far too formal. It was, after all, long before jeans and t-shirts changed everything.

We spent our wedding night in the Soi Club, a smart hotel in the Kenyan highlands, and headed out to Mombasa the next day. The hotel was a beautiful setting for a honeymoon. The views in particular were fantastic, looking out over glittering beaches of pure white sand and coconut palm trees that rocked gently in the breeze. It's still considered a very desirable place for tourists to visit, especially those going out to hunt game, although observing has long ago taken over from hunting.

During all this time my main problem was the difficult task of breaking the news to Kit. We had never formally broken up, leaving the long distance and communication delays to do most of that job for us. I spent a long time trying to find the right words to tell him. Thankfully when he received my letter he accepted the situation, despite making it clear that he was disappointed.

As always, I tried to focus on the future and the fact that I had a job to do, and I knew that on a practical level Kit and I would not have worked out as a couple. Yet I couldn't help

feeling a little bit of regret. You always do whenever you consider the road you didn't take.

After the wedding, we were posted to Mbarara, an upcountry town of western Uganda about 300 miles from Kampala, where we had to adjust to a reduced standard of living, including no electricity. Our first home there, a two-bedroom roomy bungalow was cool and as comfortable as it could be, with government-issued PWD furniture. (Public Works Department) Fortunately, my sewing skills had improved sufficiently for me to make a few curtains and cushion covers that improved the look of the house. The garden was dry, scrubby-looking grass which did not encourage our minimal gardening efforts Unfortunately, we shared the house with a flourishing family of cockroaches who made their presence felt in the evenings in the lamplight. They made a crunchy noise when trampled underfoot but were very adept at scurrying away when threatened. We were obliged to work out a modus vivendi. Our first home was unsurprisingly christened 'Cockroach Hall'.

There was a wood-burning stove for cooking, a 'meat safe' for storing goods on the cool part of the veranda next to the kitchen, and lighting in the form of oil wick lamps and 'Tilley' lamps with mantles. Water for baths had to be heated in a huge oil drum every evening. Although we had a small fridge powered by a generator, the general lack of electricity meant no record players or radios apart from battery-operated ones.

I worked at the local hospital where facilities were limited, and the main form of power was through a temperamental generator. Apart from the Medical Director and myself and

one other African doctor, the medical and nursing care was provided by Africans with varied experience and training.

In many ways, life as a doctor here was more challenging. Just like at the bigger hospital in Kampala there was plenty of expectation that I would do on-call duty, but the patients here were more spread out with long walks between the wards, which accommodated about 100 inpatients. Many were suffering from tuberculosis, a moderately infectious disease associated with a low standard of living and malnutrition. As now, TB patients were prescribed with lengthy courses of drugs and streptomycin injections. To limit transmission they were accommodated in residential clinics that could be as much as fifty miles away from the main hospital. This required my learning to drive, something I hadn't had time for before. It was achieved by David with some difficulty, as nowadays one would be able to attend a driving school.

Eventually, it would mean many long, daunting hours spent by myself in the car while on patient visits. Car radios and other forms of in-vehicle entertainment were non-existent, so you had only your own thoughts for company. At the other end, I had to deal with disputes between the patients and the medical assistants, who were nominally in charge.

It wasn't all bad as the scenery in rural Uganda was always exciting to drive through, and I enjoyed helping those under my care, many of whom were thin, emaciated men dressed in striped hospital gowns. It often reminded me of prisoners of war. Most of them were pleased to see me when I arrived. The healthcare assistants in Mbarara were less scrupulous than the ones in Kampala. They would be in the business of selling the drugs locally and this slowed down the treatment and

recovery of the patients. Handling and reducing the impact of all this was tricky to say the least, but management of the patients and ensuing inventory inspections were just part of the job.

Not long after that, I had a frantic message from Nairobi telling me that my Father had died suddenly in the night, having recently recovered from infective hepatitis while staying at the bungalow in Mombasa. This meant I had to be driven to Kampala to fly to Nairobi to be with Mum, who was staying with friends and in a dreadful state.

The cause of death was never properly established because post-mortems were rarely performed in the absence of foul play. Later I recognised that Dad's death at the early age of 56 was probably due to pulmonary embolus as a consequence of bed rest while he was ill. Heavy smoking and a relatively inactive lifestyle almost certainly contributed.

I needed to stay with Mum for a few weeks but she was determined to go back to school to her teaching job. This went well for a while, but she eventually went down with what was then described as a nervous breakdown, requiring my assistance. The result was that Mum retired temporarily from teaching and moved out of the railway house she had shared with Dad to her bungalow in Mombasa.

All these unfortunate events made life in upcountry Uganda rather an ordeal to begin with, and adapting to it took some time. At least I was used to the lack of electricity and limited plumbing, as our bungalow's amenities were very like those I had endured with my family as a teenager in Kijabe. It was my job to keep the household going, with almost no help from a local 'house boy,' Ali, other than to

draw and heat water for baths. He was only able to do simple tasks such as basic cooking so I had to get to upgrade my domestic skills pretty quickly.

David worked at the office of course but managed to opt out of most other non-work-related problems. He got involved with play readings and rehearsals for local amateur dramatic productions, which helped relieve the boredom of living in an up-country station. We held dinner parties for our expatriate colleagues and played a lot of board games. Looking back I regret there was no opportunity to learn to play bridge which, as it turned out, would have come in handy in later years. David's Dad also died while we were in Mbarara. He was well under 70, but still older than mine had been when he passed. It was a time of great sadness for both of us.

My mother was slowly adapting to widowhood, but she at least kept busy supervising the building of a guest house in the grounds of the bungalow that she and Dad had looked forward to living in after their retirement. There was no awareness then of how 'Uhuru,' or freedom, would force most ex-colonials to return to Britain.

Happier days were thankfully ahead of us. Most people around us were starting to have children, and we knew for us it would soon be the right time or us too. Our son Simon was born in 1959 during a six-month posting in Nairobi, shortly before our transfer to Dar Es Salaam in Tanganyika.

Dar proved to be a very pleasant change. We settled in a large bungalow with heavy mosquito netting on the verandas, surrounded by beautiful acacia trees. We slept under mosquito nets David was a keen sailor and so we spent many happy hours messing around on boats and swimming in the

Indian Ocean, particularly when David's mother came from the UK to stay with us. She enjoyed caring for baby Simon and working in the garden. We had a houseboy and I was kept busy looking after the extended family and doing most of the cooking.

When she wasn't around, I enjoyed taking Simon in his pushchair out to the New Africa Hotel, to have coffee and glasses of fresh lemon juice while looking out onto the glorious stretch of sea and sky before me. My coffee-drinking habit started there for sure!

Although I felt no external pressure to give up my career for motherhood, I accepted that stopping work for a while when the children were small and more dependent was only sensible. Therefore I stopped work during our time in Dar and during the early months of our next posting, where Nicholas, our second son, was born in 1961.

At the end of 1960, the Colonial Service relocated us to Aden, a very mountainous region at the tip of the Arabian peninsula, South Yemen. Travellers to the Far East would be familiar with Steamer Point, at the time an important harbour for dropping off passengers and cargo.

It was a strange location. Instead of the beautiful countries of Kenya we found ourselves somewhere that had a greater resemblance to the surface of the moon than to the desert or the jungle. Clouds of grey-coloured sand got into everything including the washing Yet the British had set up an oil refinery there, as well as a military presence in the form of an RAF base. So off we went, in blissful ignorance of our fate.

It was the end of the British Empire and the beginning of the Commonwealth. Inevitably, it was the beginning of the end of our colonial life.



1961. Me and my elder son Simon, in the garden outside my mother's house in Mombasa.

5. OFF TO ADEN

My initial years in Aden were quiet. I spent much of my time managing the household and raising our sons. Eventually, the boys started at a British-style primary school and I applied to work as a doctor in Aden's main hospital, which was located in an enormous crater. It often felt like I was walking inside a volcano.

Aden was a bizarre experience overall. It occupied a strange outpost at the end of the Red Sea, just at the point where the Indian Ocean began. The topography of the country was far from beautiful. I was surrounded by high grey cliffs, black, craggy rocks and imported sand that ranged between various shades of beige and grey. There were so many gale-force winds that when I returned home, I was made with the rest of the family to retreat to the safety of the upper parts of the house.

Malaria was a constant threat, and we had to adjust quickly to sleeping under mosquito nets. I was frequently on call, rattling around in a cheap car to visit the masses of women and children who wanted penicillin, but for the most part, I was working from 8 am until 2 pm, spending my afternoons on the beach, often sporting the same horrendous rubber flip-flops as the rest of the ex-pats. Looking out over the sea, the horizon was always dotted with working ships ferrying people back and forth from the busy harbour. It was one of three major centres of urban development in Aden, the others being the RAF base and the Maala Strait. The place felt as though it was built for a purpose. We weren't there for a holiday.

I was luckier than local Arab women, who spent most of their time crouched over cooking pots, all while their menfolk sat around and chewed khat, a drug made from leaves that could apparently induce hallucinogenic effects.

David worked in a small department, and so got to know people quickly. As always, he found others who shared his love of the theatre. He got involved in staging plays in people's houses, and even though it wasn't really my thing I attended a few. John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* was one that I remember. This was the age of new young playwriters such as Osbourne and Harold Pinter and the trend was for 'kitchen sink' dramas.

Simon and Nicholas had a very spoiled and carefree existence. I had few concerns about the quality of the school they attended, which I would have appreciated far more if I knew what was to come. When David and I were working they were looked after by a friendly nanny, or 'aya,' who had come over from Eritrea. She had been heavily influenced by Italian culture and so the boys were fed so much spaghetti that (briefly) in their eyes they became experts. She was cheap to hire, and I was glad for her help. She and the houseboy combined meant that the only housework I had to manage was making sure the bathrooms were fit for purpose.

David spent a lot of time with them when he wasn't working. He enjoyed taking them out sailing, something Simon, in particular, continues to enjoy as an adult.

Things could be difficult on the occasions when David and the boys were forced to spend time with my mother. A headteacher in mind, body and spirit, she could be very pushy and a strict disciplinarian. She disliked David's more artistic

tendencies - her main source of culture being limited to classical music - and was a dominating presence around her grandsons. When she stepped down from running the school for Indian girls in Mombasa, she moved to Malta to work for a school on an RAF base, which gave her certain perks like membership to the Air Force Club.

When we took the boys to visit her there, they embraced positive aspects like learning to swim in the pool at the club. However, she quickly earned the nickname 'the Fuhrer' after Simon and Nicholas were banned from going upstairs, mostly because they had a tendency to put their grimy hands on the walls, covering the paint in finer marks.

As you can imagine, it was a nightmare situation for someone as house-proud as she was. The boys learned to both respect and resent her in equal measure rather than be close to her.

We had four mostly uneventful years in Aden. The food was about as exciting as the landscape, consisting largely of frozen meat and veg, chips and a bright, fizzy orange drink from Stim.

By the mid-1960s life for us and everyone around us was changing permanently. Independence movements across the various European empires had been growing in size and strength, particularly in Ghana and Algeria, and in 1963 independence came to Kenya, causing a flurry of panic among many British people.

The political unease eventually reached Aden. That same year, Arab nationalists began to stage uprisings against the British presence in Aden, leading to a campaign of bombings, shootings and attacks by grenades. The uprising continued until 1966, but by 1965 many ex-pats had started to leave.

Britain would eventually retreat from one of its last colonial territories. By the time they did, at least two hundred people had been killed. Looking at how things are now, it feels like the area never really recovered.

Many of us who had carved out a life that was otherwise impossible, being exposed to a whole range of experiences we could not have dreamed of in Europe, felt a sense of reluctance about being forced to 'bail out' due to the uprisings.

I came to have mixed feelings on the subject. I know that not everything about imperialism was positive, and it's true that local people experienced exploitation. However, Europeans brought positive things with them as well, including education and healthcare, which I was very close to for big chunks of my career. I and others felt unhappy about that being forgotten so quickly. It is a nuance lost on the current generation, who have become used to a discourse that paints many things, including the legacy of the British Empire, in a black-and-white way.

Many positions in the colonial service came to a close, including David's. With his generous redundancy package, we were able to buy a house in Norwood, South London, in 1964. It was a trendy place full of trendy people. We boarded a ship, and the next chapter of our lives began.



1961. Outside our house in Khormaksar Aden. My mother, David, his mother, and our elder son Simon.



1962. Me outside our house in Aden with Simon and Nicholas.

6. BACK TO BRITAIN

Adjusting to life in London after so many years away proved difficult for David and I. It had been a long time since I had lived in Britain or Ireland, and I wasn't used to the bad weather and the high cost of living. Smoking had to go!!

David soon found a job as a tax inspector with HMRC. His love for the theatre found a better outlet in London than it had in Nairobi or Aden, and he spent much of his time outside of work producing plays and hanging out with arty and intellectual Guardian-reading types, none of whom seemed very keen on disciplining their children. This did not help with getting the boys to knuckle down with their schoolwork.

I was more conservatively minded both politically and emotionally, and I was unimpressed by people who seemed to prefer talking about things in an abstract way rather than just getting stuff done. I managed to obtain a position as a senior house officer in obstetrics and gynaecology a St James's Hospital in Balham and the Weir Maternity unit nearby. This involved being 'on call' at night 2-3 times a week and one weekend in three. We took on an au pair girl from Germany, who as well as helping with the boys was busy learning English. David's Mother proved to be an absolute star. She lived nearby in a flat in Balham.

Looking back I recognise the contribution made by Nora as my mind was all on the next job and studying for postgraduate exams. Simon and Nicholas started at the local primary school, while David's mother lived in Balham near

the maternity hospital and was very helpful, looking after the boys and sometimes cooking in the evenings.

I picked up where I had left off in Aden by working in obstetrics, but then it was suggested to me by a colleague that I look into becoming a specialist in anaesthesia. It was a career path that was becoming increasingly popular among married women, as it allowed for work on a sessional basis rather than the long hours junior doctors are normally used to.

It is worth pointing out that in modern times women doctors are becoming un-employable on account of the need for part-time work to accommodate child care. At least, it seemed that way to begin with; frequent job changes to get experience in the sub-specialities like neuro and paediatric anaesthesia could be difficult. There were plenty of teaching hospitals around so after some thought, I decided to make the change and start working towards specialist postgraduate qualifications in anaesthesia.

It proved to be very different compared to what I had done before. Although the drugs used to get patients ready for surgery were similar to the ones used in medicine now, far more emphasis was placed in the 1960s on general anaesthesia or putting people completely to sleep. Nowadays patients are more likely to be under a regional anaesthetic using spinal and epidural techniques, with sedation or light general anaesthesia as indicated.

Initially, I worked under a consultant anaesthetist until I was able to manage simple cases on my own, which enabled me to work the night shifts, involving all kinds of emergencies, many of which required complex resuscitation to prepare for surgery.

While patients were in the operating theatre it was a careful balancing act to ensure that their physiology was maintained and that the drugs used, anaesthetics and others, were monitored and titrated carefully so as not to put too much strain on their vital organs. The neurosurgeons worked on the brain at remote control, and it was my job to make sure the corrugated tubing sneaking out of the patients didn't become disconnected when covered by sterile drapes.

I spent about three years training and doing exams, followed by selected training jobs to supplement my experience. Eventually, after years of work and study, I became a felllow of The College of Anaesthetists and became a consultant at Medway and Maidstone Hospitals with sessions in Rochester and the Isle of Sheppey.

I developed an interest in chronic pain management, and as the years went on anaesthetists became increasingly involved in this field, which resulted in my studying and practising medical acupuncture. As this avoids pharmaceutical intervention and is relatively non-invasive it is eminently suitable for most patients. There are some disadvantages, the main one being that some individuals are unresponsive to acupuncture.

Things were not so straightforward when it came to my family. Neither Simon nor Nicholas did all that well at school. Nicholas spent a year at a special school in Somerset as he had been diagnosed with mild dyslexia. Slotting back into the state system proved difficult, and he ended up as a weekly boarder at Sevenoaks School where he stayed until he passed some O levels.

Simon attended Dulwich College Prep School which proved unsatisfactory, so he started back at the local primary school, eventually moving on to a grammar school in Camberwell.

At this time while trying to study for post-graduate exams in anaesthesia together with very busy hospital jobs, I came to rely even more on David's mother, Nora, who although very disapproving of my professional ambition was a great help with the boys and sometimes cooked David's dinner when I was on call at the hospital.

When I moved to Maidstone, David helped with the down payment on a spacious flat in the upper story of a large country house in East Farleigh, just outside on the way to Tonbridge. I obtained a mortgage and became a property owner at last. It was a lovely flat with three
bedrooms and two balconies, and we even had a greenhouse on the balcony at the back where there was a lovely view of the Medway River which runs through Maidstone. I grew tomatoes in the greenhouse which were productive, but they didn't ripen until September which was a bore.

Simon made the transfer to Maidstone Grammar School and settled down reasonably well. David stayed at the London house and picked up Nicholas from Sevenoaks School at the weekends. They spent the weekends at the Maidstone flat or 'Frog's Folly', as it came to be called. David joined the Medway Sailing Club in Rochester and properly taught Simon to sail. Simon went on to sail in much bigger boats on Lake Michigan when he moved to the US years later.

My relationship with Simon became strained due to his teenage rebellion stage and the responsibilities of my job. I had sessions at most of the local hospitals, both in Maidstone

and the Medway towns. Gradually I was able to drop the sessions in the Medway towns in favour of the West Kent Hospital and the Eye and Ear Hospital in Maidstone. Despite the promised 'flexibility' of my latest career step in medicine, it was anything but and I was often working late.

Whenever I was home I was always on Simon's case, trying to get him to take his school work more seriously, particularly with his O levels looming. I regret that our relationship went through such a bad patch, but I was worried about him failing, which is exactly what he did!

In 1976, his exam results in tatters, Simon was thrown out of Maidstone Grammar School. He attended a technical school in Tonbridge but made no progress. We began to despair! Then, with David and I at our wits' end with worry, salvation came in the form of a job advertisement in the British Medical Journal. This was for a specialist anaesthesiologist for an American hospital on a military base in Saudi Arabia, a three-year contract to start with. The salary was excellent, all tax-free with generous educational allowances, and job availability for student children during the long vacations. This ticked all the boxes and my previous experience in working in difficult places meant that it appeared to be the answer to our current problems.

This was the summer of 1976. I applied at once.

We reckoned that if I sold up in Maidstone and took extended leave from the NHS, while freezing my pensions, we would be able to both afford the school fees for the boys and reduce our other outgoings. Fortunately, after numerous application forms and interviews in London, I was appointed to the job and we looked into the educational opportunities

for Simon, who was at the sixth form stage by then with a lot of lost time to make up for. Simon himself needed to get involved at an early stage and David took him to see several boarding schools such as Stowe and Millfield. They had to be co-educational.

The impact of failing his O levels at least made Simon realise that he would soon need to shape up. He knew it was 'make or break' time and this made a difference to his attitude. He repeated the essential O levels and began studying for A levels at Dover College

The boys' teenage years were a challenge for us all, and overall, my home life was not great. Still, it could have been worse. We had neighbours in Dulwich with children who were very high-achieving, but one of them tragically ended his life. So maybe we had something to be thankful for having got through relatively unscathed.

Either way, it wasn't all doom and gloom. David sometimes prioritised his intellectual pursuits over and above his family, but for the most part, he was a good father, particularly when he took the boys sailing. My focus was mostly on my career, which I believe stopped me from becoming more interfering and critical of Simon and Nicholas. Both my sons grew into happy and fulfilled adults, even if I didn't always understand them. I can't ask for anything more.

After twelve years of being back in Britain, I longed for some form of escape. The salaries at home were reasonable but not the best, especially when we were hit with considerable tax bills and the boys' schooling. David had been paying the fees for Nicholas at Sevenoaks, and was relieved that my contract with Whittaker Corps covered school fees for both boys and

subsequent fees for Nicholas who needed to attend a 'crammer' to study for more A Level exams.

Going to Saudi Arabia for a few years on such a good contract was therefore an opportunity not to be missed.



1967. Me with my mother-in-law and relatives outside our house in London, near Dulwich.



1967. Me with my two sons, Simon and Nicholas, outside my mother's post-retirement home, St Paul's Bay in Malta.



1978 approx. Me with my mother-in-law and her friend.



1979. My mother and I at her holiday apartment in Coronado.

7. JANET OF ARABIA

Saudi Arabia was much as I had expected. My experience in Aden had prepared me for what it would be like, which was basically the same with more dust and general mess and no camels to be seen!

When I arrived at the airport, I was met by administrative staff from Whittaker Life Sciences, the company I was employed by, as I was arriving alone and didn't know anyone. The topography was defined by desert and rocky terrain, the smell of dust permeating everything when it wasn't repressed by air conditioning. The smell of gasoline from the masses of vehicles in urban areas and muezzin bells was everywhere.

And that was just Jeddah. After overnighting there a two-hour flight southwest took me to Abha in the high desert, at 5000 feet - another drab, featureless provincial town with craggy grey mountains in the distance. There I was met by one of the Whittaker administrators, who drove me out to the military base where the American military were employed to teach the Saudis how to fly the precursors of the F11 (the 'Top Gun' plane), a serious jet fighter. All this was remote from the hospital and included the base of the Corps of Engineers, with whom we had no contact. We had various nationalities working in the hospital and supplies department, including from most other Middle Eastern countries such as Jordan and Palestine.

The hospital was open to the local population providing a western standard of medical and surgical care. At that time

several large UK and US companies were competing to supply healthcare systems to the oil-rich countries, as they still are today. On looking back I recognise that security issues would have been paramount and our location was subject to frequent military jeep patols.

The expatriate nurses were accommodated in spacious rooms in cantonments, male and female, with guards at the gates and fraternisation discouraged. Whittaker had provided a good recreation centre with a restaurant, a bar (soft drinks only) and a large swimming pool where the sexes could mix normally. There was also a grocery store with limited stock. Several times a week the female staff were taken by bus into the suq at Khamis Mushait, the local township for shopping. The senior administrative and professional staff lived in villas complete with maid's quarters, within easy walking distance of the hospital where life was less regimented, although we had occasional military patrols to put up with. We soon adapted to the restricted lifestyle, and the women became accustomed to wearing trousers or long kaftans off base.

It has to be said that I didn't do much intrepid exploring. Aside from the odd chicken pecking and scratching about on the base, the outside world was kept at bay. Like most of the ex-pats, I rarely ventured into the nearby town except for shopping. Many of those around me were Scandinavians (mostly tax exiles), Americans and Palestinians, and for the most part we all got on well.

So, what did we do for fun? We made wine, which we stored in our maid's quarter. We had no domestic help apart from Sri Lankan or Filipino employees, who made themselves available for hire on an hourly basis for the professional and

administrative staff. Brewing wine or beer was forbidden and we had to be very careful to keep it out of sight. Yet the whole process was accepted by the authorities if kept strictly undercover. After all, ingredients such as malt, yeast, red and white grape juice were widely available.

Shortly after I arrived one of my medical colleagues invited me to his villa for a 'sid and tonic' after work which was a surprise! The 'sid' turned out to be a distilled product tasting like a very oily gin and was very illegal indeed! 'Sid' was manufactured off base in cantonments of the big western companies supplying and maintaining parts for planes and vehicles etc, and smuggled in illegally. 'Sid' was short for 'sidiki' (translated as 'my friend' in English), and tasted reasonable only when diluted with tonic. This was a rare treat kept very much under cover. The expatriates became very proficient in wine production which, although prohibited, was a lesser offence than distilling which would be instant dismissal.

As one of only two anaesthesiologists with an almost complete range of surgical specialists (although no thoracic or neurosurgery), and a small intensive care unit to cover, we were fully occupied. There was emergency work to cover road traffic and other accidents, plus obstetric emergencies to keep us busy in and outside of normal working hours. A couple of nurse anaesthetists assisted us with complicated cases and were also qualified to work independently, as is normal in the US.

My colleague Peter came from Malta and we worked well together as a team. Patients would come in damaged and bleeding and I would be there to check their blood pressure

and get them ready for scans and surgery, placing them on a ventilator and giving them a muscle relaxant as needed. There were no MRIs to check for brain damage, but CAT scanning was available and sufficient for purpose. Sometimes I was awake through the night when these patients came in, but it was just part of the job. The intensive care requirement needed to be increased and a third anaesthesiologist, an American named Bob Cummings, joined us. Our on-call commitment was now one day in three, and local leave for a week or two became possible

Life after work at least provided some distractions. Unlike the other female members of staff, many of whom were saving up to get married, I was mostly a free agent, and in no mood to make too many commitments. I was in the business of building a financial nest egg in a non-tax environment for as long as possible as my UK pension had been curtailed while I remained overseas. Most evenings we had a film show put on at the recreation centre specialising in westerns, early James Bond and Burt Reynolds movies, and we could enjoy a glass of our home-produced wine with our dinner on off-duty days. I continued like this for many months, with no special relationships.

Yet with myself and David's relationship at a low point, I soon found myself drawn to an ex-soldier called Mike. He was Irish and had served for a while as part of the armed forces in the United Nations, and like me was used to the ex-pat. life. He had wound up with Whittaker after taking a job in logistics, ensuring that the base we lived on was supplied with everything it needed.

Mike was average-looking, sporting a weather-beaten, slightly craggy appearance, but what he lacked in conventional good looks he made up for by being a great storyteller. Unlike most of the doctors, I had to work with he wasn't a snob, and I was encouraged by how he didn't seem to think everyone was beneath him. It was also novel experience meeting and talking to a non-medical personnel. At that time the other professional ex-pats tended to keep to themselves socially, which became somewhat limiting after a while.

We were only a few months apart in age, and got on well together, going to movie shows and cooking dinner either in his apartment or my villa. After a while, Mike, having proved himself indispensable to the management, was promoted to Deputy Director of Supplies, responsible for setting up the 'just in time' requisitioning and the early development of digital services and computerisation. This was all in the late 1970s when all these services were just getting going worldwide.

Like me, Mike was married, to a wife who was a far more devout Catholic than myself or Mike, and we were careful not to put our relationship on display. In that sort of situation, it becomes hard not to compare yourself to your partner's spouse, and her piety stirred feelings of guilt about my own lapsed Catholicism.

Still, I like to think I was at least, possibly, more fun and I wasn't alone in starting a new relationship in middle age. Many of the ex-pats around us were in their late forties and fifties, with children who were no longer dependent. Most of the staff had grown weary of life back home, all victims of high taxation with the need to shell out on educating children of

university age. They were all in the business of changing their lives for the better, emotionally as well as financially. It was a time of flux for many of us.

Mike shared a villa with a dentist from Finland who liked to entertain, especially ladies, on his ostentatious tiger skin rug! Unlike the locals, the ex-pats were not forbidden from mixing with the opposite sex, but unless married such relationships needed to be kept to the recreation centre or behind closed doors. For the most part, the authorities turned a blind eye. The Saudi population were unlikely to be corrupted by our lifestyle, as the wine and beer-making and consumption was limited to the western employees and a few Jordanian radiologists.

Life could still be restrictive. Although we often ate in the on-site cafeteria, outside of that we only cooked in our villas which were well-equipped with big American fridges. The women needed to adjust to the lack of hairdressers, and we got used to wearing kaftans rather than western clothes whenever we went off base for shopping expeditions. Groups of us would get together at the weekends occasionally to go on trips 200 miles or so down the escarpment to the Red Sea, on a German-built road that got washed away in storms a few years after our departure. The stony beach was not very user-friendly for camping and we needed plenty of padding, blankets and cushions to put under our sleeping bags. Sometimes we met with local fishermen who would sell us fish, which we barbecued in foil wrapping after oiling (olive oil with herbs). This was surprisingly delicious served with salad which we brought with us, and burgers were another

successful supper dish. Washed down with our own red wine. What could be better?

Swimming, our morning activity was somewhat dodgy as we wondered what was underfoot and we were reluctant to go too deep in case there were sharks around. The water was really too shallow for miles out to see, so we were more at risk of treading on stone fish, which can sting quite badly. Needless to say, I much preferred beach walks and exploration and didn't go in the sea except for the odd paddle, wearing water-proof shoes.

That said, we had opportunities for local holidays, and whenever I felt frustrated I would simply plan where Mike and I would take a trip next.

Israel and Jordan became some of our favourite locations. The archaeological splendour of Petra was on full display to us as we rode down the valley on donkeys (nowadays one has to go down in a jeep). Afterwards, we were able to unwind more than we could in Saudi Arabia, given that we could drink alcoholic beverages in the hotels. We had to be careful not to have our passports stamped if we ventured into Israel, as our return to Saudi would have been compromised. I must admit the visit to Israel was well worth it just to swim in the Dead Sea and come out with a layer of black sand all over, the best skin treatment ever!

My family was still a presence in my life. I wrote to Simon and Nicholas while they were at boarding school, and during the school holidays they came out to Saudi Arabia to work. They were given temporary jobs around the hospital such as portering or in the Stores Department or Administration. I didn't see much of them in the evenings as they had their own

lives. I never knew what they got up to, and I preferred to keep it that way.

While the boys were staying with us for the summer break David came to stay as well. This was not a success. David and Mike were very different personalities, which was one of the numerous reasons they did not get along. David and I went on holiday together to Greece later but in the end, we realised the marriage was over. He went home, I returned to Mike, and we eventually divorced in 1979. Extramarital relations and different priorities eventually prevailed. It was time to move on.

Despite this, David and I remained friends for the rest of his life until he died following a stroke in 2002 when he was only 74. Mike and I remained together for 29 years until he died of pulmonary fibrosis, a severe form of COPD, in his mid-70s.

After only completing two years of my three-year contract, I was forced to leave the base at Khamis. It was bewildering, as up until this point the authorities had ignored the ex-pat parties that were a frequent feature of life in the compound. Right until his dying day Mike believed one of the Palestinian ex-pats who worked at the hospital had decided to report us to the military as a result of some grievance. This was probably true, but we will never know, of course.

One way or another I was told to leave the compound straight away, and I boarded the first plane out of Saudi Arabia the next morning. But this event was not as disastrous as it seemed at first. Mike was soon appointed as director of supplies and logistics at the new Whittaker project in the Emirates, and I was appointed as an anaesthesiologist, one of

four at Tawam Hospital, a new project in Abu Dhabi. We moved there in early 1980.

A new year, a new decade, and a new stage of life.



1980. Me and my mother sitting at the swimming pool at Whitley's, when I worked in Saudi Arabia.



1980's. Me on holiday in Athens.



Late 1970s-early 80s. Me on holiday in Greece.

8. THE MOVE TO ABU DHABI

In the meantime, I returned to the UK and moved into my mother's flat in Bournemouth where she had decided to settle. She spent the winter on Coronado island in California, and it did not take much persuading for me to join her there, where we spent a few weeks together in her rental apartment, exploring the sites often on bicycles.

Our delight was Sunday brunch at the very smart Del Coronado Hotel, famous for being the haunt of the Prince of Wales and Mrs Simpson in years past. When I returned to the UK in the New Year, an opportunity arose for me to do a locum job as a consultant anaesthetist at St. Basil's Hospital in Gibraltar, which kept me busy until it was time for me to join Mike in the next period of employment with Whittaker Life Sciences in Abu Dhabi.

Al Ain, Abu Dhabi is an inland city about 70 miles from the coastal city of Abu Dhabi, and Dubai city in the next Emirate. There are seven Emirates in the kingdom under the overall rule of Abu Dhabi, which was then controlled by King Fahd. The larger Emirates are all oil-producing states, and the standard of living of the local Arab population was, and still, is very high. There was also a large expatriate population.

Another well-known Emirate is Sharjah, as well as the more mountainous Emirate, Fujairah, which is wrapped around the point of the peninsular that faces into the Straits of Hormuz – the route of the massive tankers taking oil west from the Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

The shipping routes in the region are of strategic importance, now and then, and then there is the threatening presence of Iran to the north of the Gulf. My memories are always a sobering reminder of the need to wean ourselves of fossil fuels for anything to change politically.

Tawam Hospital was large compared to the Whittaker hospital in Saudi Arabia, with about 300 beds covering most specialities, and four operating rooms. We had the odd visit from the Loma Linda heart team in California just as we had in Saudi Arabia, when a surprisingly large number of patients scheduled for cardiac operations would have surgery under their expert care. Otherwise, we provided all routine surgical care and there was a well-equipped, up-to-date intensive care unit. This was well-used, as road traffic accidents were almost epidemic, with artificial ventilation prescribed for a high number of the victims, often for several weeks.

As a result, we had four specialist anaesthesiologists including an intensivist, meaning that we lived were 'on call' every fourth night. As well as operating lists we had to provide anaesthesia for radiological procedures, and with a big recovery room as well as the intensive care unit we were kept pretty busy.

Mike was in the process of organising the large (compared with Khamis Mushait) supply department with logistics and up-to-date computerisation to oversee. He was given a good apartment and a large sedan car as part of his contract. My apartment was in the same block as Mike's in the main avenue a mile or so from the hospital in Al Ain's downtown area

For on-call nights and weekends, I was provided with a small hut on the hospital compound with a sitting room,

bedroom and minute kitchen and bathroom. From there it was easy to walk to the hospital. I cooked good but simple meals there, just as I would in my apartment in town. Apartment number D66 will be forever etched in my memory.

Al Ain, the name of the local village, meant 'the eye' in Arabic and was originally an oasis, but was, by then well-developed with a shopping street and even a park with grassy areas and children's play areas. It is much better than the relatively sparse conditions we had experienced in Saudi Arabia. The shops had a good selection of groceries and frozen food, and we were allowed to have a ration of wine and beer through an allowance arranged with Whittaker Corp, our employer. Our standard of living improved no end and we were even able to hold dinner parties on off-duty nights!

A particular treat was to have weekend trips to Dubai or Abu Dhabi which were already, in the early 1980s, well-provided with a selection of western hotels such as Intercontinental, Sheraton and Fortes all offering upmarket bars and restaurants. Two of the other Emirates, Sharjah and Fujairah, were also at an earlier stage of development which would come to fruition in the 21st century, when they became important holiday destinations for the rich and famous. When we were there, the older more unique features such as the suqs were the main attraction.

The big hotels also offered 'dune buggying' which was great fun, bouncing over golden sand dunes in huge, fat-tired jeeps. We also enjoyed going on magnificent 'goat grabs' in the desert, sometimes invited by minor royalty who lived in the vicinity. Sitting on colourful mats, we would help ourselves from huge salvers of goat, roasted to perfection with a

selection of exotic savoury roasted vegetables and rice, all with a unique middle eastern flavour.

Our student children were also able to visit once a year at company expense and this included a variety of holiday jobs. As we were at Tawam for five years, my eldest son moved from school to university during this time and saw the attractions of the expatriate lifestyle. One of his subjects at Sussex University was Business Studies, and eventually, he got his first job with the 'Cementation' company in Dubai after he graduated. Nicholas eventually went on to study Classical Civilisation at Hull University.

After five years Whittaker Corps ended its contract with the government of Abu Dhabi and, as result, our contracts also ended and we had to face up to our return to the UK. Whittakers arranged a big farewell 'jolly' for senior staff at the Fujirah Hilton which included a desert 'goat grab' and a big evening beach party with a band.

Facing up to retirement in our mid-fifties was not too difficult as we had sent the bulk of our salaries to a retirement Fund Manager in the UK while we were in Saudi Arabia, as we were on contract with no pension rights to look forward to. Our funds were invested at a good time for international stock markets. This was 1985 and the relatively good times continued until the end of the century. Mike had, long ago, sent his army pension over to his wife but was sufficiently affluent after his years with Whittaker to be able to look forward to a secure future. This was supplemented by a bonus for the years worked.

My NHS pension had taken a battering due to my time abroad (and the covetable 'green card' residence permit). The result was that I couldn't stop working when we returned to Britain, so I settled for doing locum work in the local hospitals in Bournemouth and Poole. This kept me going for the next five years until 1962, when I finally gave up my anaesthetic career but still carried on with the acupuncture sessions in the intractable Pain Clinic at Poole Hospital. Even these came to an end after a year or two due to the loss of funding in the NHS. Mike's children, Brian and Ray, were just as rebellious as my two sons, and like their Dad had settled for an international existence. After studying at University College Dublin, they moved to the United States with no residence permits. They were pretty resourceful and adventurous, and managed to continue with holiday jobs in Boston and extend them onto more permanent employment, the covetable 'green card.' His daughter, who was a few years younger than the boys had graduated from Trinity College and remained in Ireland

Ray had trained as a chef and managed to secure good jobs for the most part in the famous 'North End' district, while Mike's elder son, Brian, played the drums in various bands before pursuing a career in computer graphics. Like Simon and Nicholas, they came out to the Middle East to do various jobs during their school holidays, but they never really gelled with each other as friends. Nicholas was not attracted to overseas life and after three years at Hull University, he took up carpentry and worked with a company supplying custom-built windows for listed buildings in London.

We had decided to buy a property in Bournemouth, largely to be near my mother who had retired and was getting on in years. Mike wasn't too keen on being in close proximity to my mother, possibly for the same reason as David, in that she could be somewhat demanding. It was undoubtedly a less independent life than the one we had experienced out in the Middle East, but he also didn't want to return to Cork, where he was from. The Irish economy was in tatters at the time and going back was not an option for him. Later on, things changed for the better in Ireland once it joined the EU, but that only came about in the 1990s. As a result, Mike's younger daughter felt no need to join the emigration trend set by her brothers.

It was the right decision, but as the plane landed back in Britain for the last time, it felt like the end of an era. My overseas life was truly at an end.

9. HAPPY FINAL DECADES

Even if my adventures abroad were at an end, I still wanted to get stuck in and move on with the next phase of my life. Mike was a practical man and his priorities were keeping fit and playing duplicate bridge at the Wessex Bridge Club, now defunct since the obsession with communication and mobile phones.

Life was relatively smooth. We got to know other people in the area and the hospitals, and I would frequently drop in on my mother, who had never remarried after the death of my father and was living alone. She had moved from Malta to France in the 1970s and we visited her several time to sample the fleshpots of Antibes and Juan Les Pins, staying in her smart flat. Her grandsons also visited but were less welcome on account of the 'hands-on walls' syndrome! Mum stayed in France for about six years, but then began to worry about the healthcare system which was deemed to be inferior to the NHS for foreigners at that time! How things have changed in the 21st century.

Besides, Mum never learned much French, which limited her to a certain extent as it was difficult to play bridge without a few colloquialisms. So in the mid-70s Mum moved to Bournemouth, advised by friends that it was a 'resort town' with lots going on. That's changed as well, and not for the better!

Mike and I settled on Bournemouth for our life in retirement and we bought a pleasant top-floor penthouse

apartment not too far from Mum, who lived near a synagogue near Boscombe. Mum wasn't Jewish of course, but most of her friends in France were and owned flats in the same block as second homes.

I visited Mum increasingly frequently as the years went on and she needed more help with shopping and cooking. We enjoyed each other's company. She had often been prickly and exacting, but the older I got, the more I could recognise her good qualities and that I could see myself in her! She spent a lot of time watching television and playing bridge, becoming very popular among other players during sessions of 'rubber' bridge. When she could be tempted out on trips we would head to nearby beautiful and tranquil Exbury Gardens which she loved. I always remember choosing the Premier League Final Saturday in May, which meant fewer cars on the road, for an expedition to the gardens to see the rhododendrons and azaleas, always at their best at that time of the year.

Mum also loved going to art galleries, and I developed a taste for it, somewhat belatedly. Once we traveled up to Scotland together, reliving the trips we had made when I was a child. The Scottish art galleries are second to none, particularly the Glasgow ones. That was an experience that caused me to reflect. I loved the Scottish islands we had visited earlier in my life and I found them no less beautiful going back. I had also never seen Scotland as separate from the rest of the UK, feeling a great sense of union and kinship with the people there as well as the land. There was little political pressure in the 1980s to see things differently; yet later on, when Tony Blair became Prime Minister and Nicola Sturgeon the First Minister of Scotland's devolved government, I felt

that Scotland had become separate from the rest of Britain in a way that was unnecessarily hostile. Things are not improving now. What a pity!

One way in which I differed from my mother, and always would, was her enthusiasm for sport. When she was younger she had played tennis, something which she tried to get me to engage with, to no avail. When less agile in her later years, she would watch snooker religiously on the TV - something which Mike enjoyed teasing her for, as he thought that she didn't understand it. He was quite right on reflection, as I think she didn't keep up with the scoring and the order of pocketing of the coloured balls. I believe there is a distinct male/female aspect to this, as most men seem to know the order of pocketing of the colours.

The national obsession with snooker has not continued for some reason and is very subdued these days. This is obviously due to mobile phones and social media. Our lives are now dictated by Silicon Valley and 'influencers'. How boring is that!

I remained stubbornly uninterested in sports. I privately continued to wish I was taller and quicker and more svelte, a hangover from an education system where playing games was equated with being alert and high-achieving at everything else, but I continued to enjoy long walks, either with people or dogs, as my main form of exercise. It was a tendency I fear I may have passed down to my sons. Neither Simon nor Nicholas were sporty, despite their father taking them sailing, something which Simon still tries to do. Simon now lives in Illinois US not far from Chicago and sails most weekends during the summer where plenty of wind can be guaranteed.

My mother's final years were peaceful ones, which is something I feel glad about. I was worried about her savings lasting but her investment manager organised them to provide sufficient funds for old age, when outgoings for everyone are at their maximum. Rather than leaving the residue of her estate to me, I talked her into leaving it to her grandsons. The fact that I would be facing similar problems one day was not lost on me – perhaps that's inevitable though. We all get old. Thank God for pensions!

The result was that Nicholas was able to buy a flat in what would become the trendy London suburb of Tufnell Park, and the rental income he received from that has kept him going since retirement, which is when he bought the canal boat that he lives in now.

Throughout the 1990s my mother started to grow weaker, and in 1997 she passed away. It was a sad moment, but in some ways I found it easier to adjust than some of the people around me on account of my background in medicine. As was so often the case, when difficulties arose I adapted well enough. I felt relieved that I had looked after her sufficiently well and that she had spent her final two years in a comfortable nursing home. Every evening I would visit her and we would have a glass of sherry together. Those remain fond memories.

Mum hadn't always been an easy person to get on with, but she had pushed me to do my best. Furthermore, I find myself becoming more tolerant as I get older, accepting each person for who they are rather than wishing them to be something they will never be. The way I see it, we ended things on good terms.

Prior to that, I had made the decision to semi-retire, stepping down from my work as a locum doctor in 1992. There was a big party to see me off. It was a satisfying way to end that stage of my life, but I didn't see it as the end of my career. I was still very interested in pain management. New opportunities were opening up in my profession for those who wanted to lessen the suffering of patients with short-term or chronic pain, so I decided to embrace them by training in acupuncture. In many instances, it will provide relief when other more complicated medical interventions fail, which I found when I worked in this field in my later years at Poole Hospital. Acupuncture acts via the nervous system, drawing on traditional Chinese methods of pain management by inserting needles into the skin and thereby manipulating the conduction of pain signals to the brain. My work included embracing other forms of acupuncture, such as attaching magnets and electrical stimulation to particular points in the ear in order to have a similar effect.

On the whole, it was a refreshing change, far removed from what was available when I first did my medical training. I found the theories easy to understand and I liked the simplicity involved in attending to patients without having to be in a hospital environment, as it was very suitable for outpatient clinics and domiciliary settings.

Acupuncture also took me to interesting places such as China, where I got to see where this form of medicine had come from. It was fascinating to see how very different and undeveloped China was compared with the UK at that time. It has more than caught up since then!

The vast difference between the China of even the later years of the twentieth century and now is in itself one of the wonders of the world! When I visited China in the early 1990s, even Beijing looked relatively impoverished compared with Britain. Teeming millions were still moving around on bicycles. Now in Britain, we have almost been overtaken by the 21st-century progress in China. Certain experiences from that trip, such as seeing the Terracotta Warriors and watching cormorants dive for fish in the rivers, will forever stay with me.

Looking back on my medical career, I was satisfied but I couldn't honestly say I would have a career in medicine again as things are now. Like many people who become doctors or nurses, I started out wanting to help the 'suffering humanity' I saw around me, but decades in the profession made me more cynical. There was plenty of sniping and snobbery among my colleagues and the older I got, the more of a culture of patients suing over the smallest infractions seemed to become endemic. The NHS has been overtaken by bureaucracy and is almost divorced from the social care sector, which is still relatively neglected. My NHS pension had also been attenuated due to my years spent working abroad in a tax-free environment, something I knew could lead to difficulties in old age.

My relationship with Mike was stable, even though we chose to remain as partners rather than get married. We enjoyed each other's company but maintained a healthy form of emotional independence at the same time, with my time outside of medicine focused on making new friends.

We enjoyed many holidays visiting our sons in the US. Simon moved jobs a lot but was mostly centred in the midwest. Brian and Ray, Mike's sons, settled in Boston and Cambridge on the east coast and we got to know Boston and New England pretty well. It was even possible to swap a couple of weeks of our 'time-share' holding in Tenerife for a vacation in the Berkshire Mountains situated at the westerly end of Massachusetts.

We stayed in touch with a number of people we had known in the Middle East, but they had scattered to such an extent that maintaining contact was difficult. One memorable visitation was to San Antonio in Texas for a Tawam reunion party. We were driven there from Florida, the retirement home of one of Mike's colleagues, on a four-day journey through the southern States and into Texas. San Antonio was beautiful, with plenty of greenery and gardens with a river running through, so unexpected in a State associated with rodeos, and The Alamo. The party was a great success, and it was good to meet so many old friends and the occasion was 'well oiled' by an apparently everlasting stream of frozen margaritas!

Back in Bournemouth, I went out for coffee and lunch dates with female friends, dressing fashionably in high heels and carrying a smart handbag. Life was quite different for a lot of women my age back then. Many of those in my social circle had not worked in the past and lived in substantial properties with enormous gardens. Gardening never has appealed to me apart from growing tomatoes in bags,

Such friendships are still important to me, even if fashion is no longer as important as it once was; I still talk to my good

friend in Norwich frequently to exchange news about my two sons and her two daughters. It seems amazing how life has changed.

My sons were gradually starting to lead more settled lives. Nicholas had gone through a 'hippy' phase at university, spending most of his time living in a transit van. He never quite left this tendency behind even as he got older. He and Simon each inherited a substantial sum when their Father died in 2000 and Nicholas spent his on a picturesque old house near Machynthleth in Snowdonia, where we spent many lovely holidays while his daughter Genevieve was small.

Career-wise Nicholas' company was kept busy replacing old windows in listed buildings, as plasticised window frames are forbidden in listed properties. His partner, Marianne is a teacher and at that time was able to position herself strategically on the council property waiting list in Camden. This enabled them to be given a 5th story two-bedroomed flat. This solved their housing problem after Genevieve was born. The location of the flat was convenient for walks along the canal near Camden Lock. I treated Nicholas, Marianne and Genevieve to a week in Bournemouth once a year in a holiday flat, which we all enjoyed.

Simon built a career as an international businessman, working mostly in marketing. He met his wife while she was working as an air stewardess, and they built a good life for themselves in America with their two children, Jasmine and Julian. Simon mostly works with specialised cameras for sports and travels extensively in and outside the US. His wife, well-read with an English degree, has had various jobs, including working as a librarian and teaching in a Montessori school

over the years. Now her main interest is riding and she loves horses, the 'mucking out' just as much as riding them.

For a number of years, Mike and I remained in good health. We had given up smoking many years ago when I had managed to convince him to quit the habit while we were in Saudi Arabia.

In the Middle East, my physical activities had rarely advanced beyond swimming, which I kept up by doing 20 or so lengths in the recreation centre pool. Swimming lanes were not recognised in those days and it was a case of having to do battle with squealing kids.

Back in Bournemouth, we joined a local precursor of the David Lloyd Club and both went to the gym twice a week. In the 1980s people were embracing pilates and aerobics, dressed in loud-coloured leotards and leggings with Jane Fonda setting the scene. In spite of regular attendance and lessons, I never did all that well and remained stubbornly plump. Such a waste of time, and it might have been better to have stuck with jogging, an equally popular leisure activity then, although its since been overtaken by running in expensive trainers.

A constant factor in my life has been my regret that no one in my family has been remotely athletic. If I could be reincarnated, I would prefer to be someone who could at least throw a ball!

As much as I don't envy the strict lifestyles of professional athletes, I've often felt strongly that being naturally sporty makes it easier to look good, and above all to keep fit.

As time went on, I managed to escape developing osteoporosis, and regularly had my arteries checked. I mostly avoided major health scares until about five years ago, when a

hereditary form of arthritis led to the development of a form of spinal stenosis, or gradual spinal collapse. I've also had to have a knee joint replaced. I felt I was falling apart!

As the years went on I come to rely on my trusty rollator to get about and having given up driving, have got used to using the buses. Mike was not so lucky. He suddenly contracted obstructive pulmonary fibrosis, a disease that affects the lungs. A lung transplant could have saved him, but unhappily for both of us, he was too old to be considered a candidate. The condition wasn't related to smoking – it was just bad luck. He gradually declined over 12 months.

It was 2006, and we were both in our early seventies, potentially with a lot of life left ahead of us. Yet twenty-four hours after Mike was told his health was in terminal decline, he died. It was all very calm. He had never been one for histrionics. I was devastated and so grateful for the support of his sister, Nuala.

His immense family soon descended on Bournemouth and having been raised in a very small family, I was forced to get used to being part of a very big family, including all the drama that went with that. Mike's son Brian arrived too late from America to be there for his father's passing and wasn't pleased with how I was handling things, possibly as a way of processing his grief. However, Nuala and brother Frank were extremely helpful, as were his vast number of relatives in Winnipeg in Canada.

His first requiem mass was at the local Roman Catholic Church in Bournemouth, after which his ashes were taken to his hometown of Bantry in County Cork, and a mass was held for him. It was the send-off he would have wanted.



1980's. Bournemouth Gardens.



1980s-1990s. Early retirement; me with my partner of 29 years Mike Gillespie in Tenerife.



1980s-1990s. Me on a Rhine river cruise near Strasbourg.



1985-6 approx. Me with my younger son Nicholas on the Humber Bridge.



1987. Me and my partner Mike at my mother's 80th birthday party.



1987. Me on holiday in Barbados at a timeshare.



1990s. Me on a day trip to Prague.



1993. Me and my (Turkish) daughter-in-law Isil in their house in Dubai.



Early 1980s. Me and my mother at Khamis KSA.



Me somewhere near Camden (Payton Place), MA, New England USA on holiday.



Mid-80s. Me in the kitchen in our penthouse flat in Bournemouth.



Mid-1980s. Me in Brittany.



1980. Me in Honolulu.



1982 approx. Me on holiday in Hawaii.

10. BECOMING A WILCOX

So my twenty-nine years with Mike were over. Ageing and death is what makes old age such fun! It was a deeply sad time, but I would know happiness again. And that came in the form of a man named Tom Wilcox.

Being practical by nature I decided to find a solution to my solitude. The main aim was to maintain contact with the world and defer decrepitude and the serious end of the ageing process. So, when an opportunity arose to sign up with a local dating agency that had a specific focus on the elderly and was also local, I went for it. This was before the 'online dating' era took over and therefore I didn't need photographs, although a few, sufficiently flattering ones, were arranged by the agency director who also conducted a personal interview to construct a profile. I started meeting up with the various men the agency matched me with. Admittedly my hopes had been a bit high in terms of finding someone young and sexy, which was totally unrealistic.

However, I knew that the agency would probably temper those expectations in a tactful manner. The man I found had something about him that I found very appealing.

Before that, there were a few duds. I met one, named Peter, who lived in New Milton, who was boring and self-absorbed, mostly because he seemed to enjoy going on about what a 'stud' he was! I was rather put off, to say the least!

Eventually, at the end of 2009, I was matched with an 83-year-old man named Tom Wilcox. When I met Tom he was in

his early eighties and I was in my late seventies. We met in a coffee shop in Bournemouth which I frequented rather more than him due to my coffee addiction.

Tom (or Teddy's) main interest was bowling and he had been president of his club in north Bournemouth. He had a large family with as many as six granddaughters and one or two great-grandchildren.

Like me, Teddy had been married before, and for a while, much of his time had been spent looking after his second wife who had suffered from circulatory failure. Many years before we met, he had lost his first wife as a result of lung cancer. So, despite having a large family they all had busy lives, with little time for visiting him. By the time we had met he had been a widower for close to three years, and lived in a large bungalow in a distant suburb of Bournemouth.

Furthermore, he had been a civil engineer for most of his working life, in a very similar occupation to my father. He had some money tucked away, and drove a nice car, an elderly Volvo, which no doubt had some appeal for me, but certainly wasn't the main reason I said 'yes' when after six months of seeing each other he suggested we get married. We had enjoyed several coach holidays, including a particularly fun one on Lake Garda in Italy. I had sensed very quickly that he was a kind man, and a lot of fun, and we got on well. You could say we were 'two hearts singing in waltz time'!

Overall, I enjoyed his company and he mine, and it was a welcome break from having been alone for so long. He was the old-fashioned sort who saw marriage as right and proper, and I had no objection to that.

Not everyone saw it that way. Tom's children and their partners disapproved of our union on a number of levels. Being a fervent Catholic, his daughter-in-law who lived in Wetherby, West Yorkshire seemed to think I wasn't devout enough, which made me feel insecure. She was probably right, not that it should have mattered. Teddy was from a Church of England background and was more observant than I was, but rarely took that or himself too seriously.

That was one of the things I liked about him.

His children were somewhat suspicious and might even have suspected that I might be after his savings! And, after all his second wife had only died three years before. His daughter Jan was an active and experienced golfer, which also made me feel inadequate about not being sporty. She was ultimately more forgiving and I think came to accept me, while Ian, her brother, never really liked me. Maybe he thought that Teddy was marrying again too soon after the death of his second wife. Nevertheless, Teddy and I decided, at our relatively advanced ages, to keep our estates separate. We only had a joint bank account for housekeeping expenses, which was necessary given that we lived together.

We married at a simple ceremony in a hotel in Bournemouth, the 'Miramar,' with both our families, his large and mine, relatively far-flung, in attendance. It was followed by a honeymoon on Lake Como.

Our union lasted for seven years and was short compared with the time I had with David and Mike, but it was a very happy one. We always knew that our time together might be limited, but that was never a deterrent to our union.

Where to live had been the question. For starters, Tom lived in a spacious bungalow in north Bournemouth at Ferndown with a large garden, and he assumed I would want to move in. On reflection, we decided that running a large establishment in old age was not very practical, and we decided to downgrade to my flat in Branksome, with easy access to the shops.

Teddy was still interested in travel and we spent a few holidays abroad in Europe as well as one or two cruises. There was a memorable trip to stay in four-star splendour at a beach hotel in Dubai. Simon was working there at the time and was able to show us around the magnificent suq and other up-market hotel complexes. Swimming in the warm water of the Gulf with a white sandy beach was a luxury.

We also went on coach trips to places like Tenby in Wales and Bembridge, Isle of Wight and on international cruise trips. We made other friends with whom we went on holiday to Gran Canaria. I even preferred Gran Canaria to Tenerife, where Mike and I had a timeshare for nearly 20 years.

On the whole, my seven years with Tom, who I christened Teddy were the most successful of all my relationships. David always had his own priorities, while Mike and I had met at the height of our working lives. We were a unit, but primarily he was a hobbyist, so we were friendly rather than passionate.

Teddy and I hugely improved the quality of each other's later years, and he made up in some ways for my having come from a not hugely close-knit family - even if that did mean his relatives got under each other's feet a lot more than mine did.

Teddy already had a few health issues and it was obvious that our driving days were coming to an end. Driving in

extreme old age is not very sensible in my opinion, and walking if possible is a better alternative as a way to maintain mobility. This proved to be a good decision, and we enjoyed a varied and pleasant life with no lawns to mow or hedges to trim!

Things became grim when his health completely failed. He had an aortic aneurysm, which meant frequent hospital visits, and in 2011 he had a stent fitted by some very clever vascular surgeons that I so admired. Teddy died in 2018, having spent the last few months of his life in a comfortable care home a short walk from our flat. Mind you, the 'beast from the east' was blowing like mad in the early part of the year and getting to that care home on the rollator was tricky in the snow.

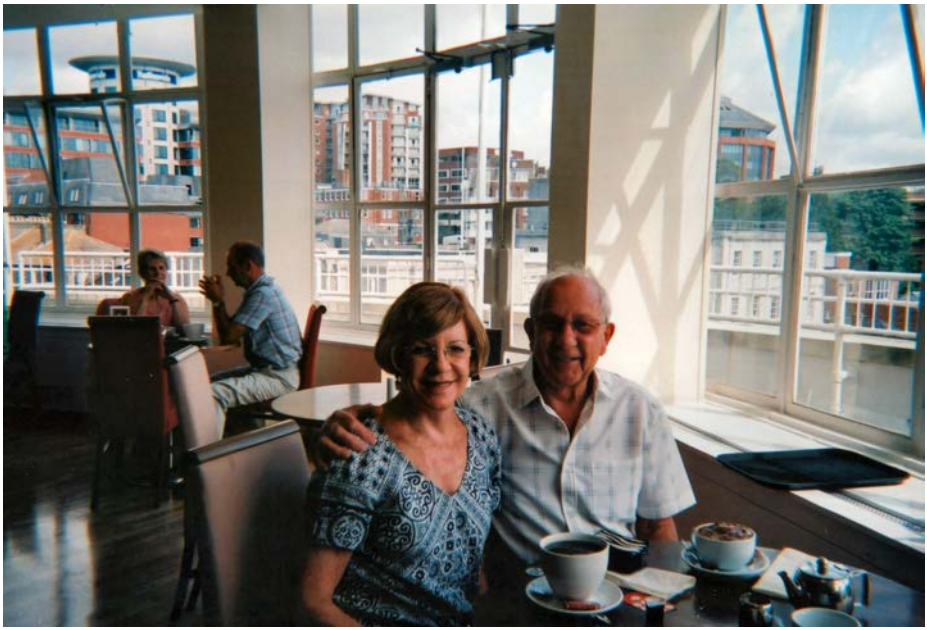
His send-off was moving, with the funeral held at the Harbour View Crematorium in a rural location near Langton Matravers. Jan had come to visit Teddy a lot in the care home, and although she was sometimes impatient with me, she helped to look after her dad in his final months, and he saw a lot of his granddaughters from both sides of the family.

Teddy hadn't been as devout as he probably had been earlier in his life, maybe because he had grown tired of church, but faith still meant something to him. It was certainly a comfort at the end.

After his death at the end of October, I felt lonely and bereft. I still miss him. Apart from the odd greeting from the neighbours - the apartments do not lend themselves to social interaction among elderly residents - I had to wait for some time for a visit from either of my sons who lived miles away, with Simon in the midwest, a few thousand miles away!

I immediately decide to get rid of excess possessions, 'stuff' in other words starting with a 5- seater sofa. A very pleasant young lady came to inspect and eventually buy the sofa. I asked her where she worked and she told me it was as the Manageress at a local 'Abbeyfield' Home which provided accommodation for reasonably fit elderly people. I remembered visiting Westbourne House with Teddy shortly after we were married and we both decided that it would be an excellent destination for us as we got even older and were unable to drive. To cut a long story short I moved to a small 2-room unit in Westbourne House, taking some of my furniture and other bits and pieces, in time for Christmas and put my own flat on the market

This has turned out to be the ideal solution to loneliness in old age and I am still here alive and 'sort of well' over four years later. The peripatetic stage of my life has certainly come to an end and I can, I hope, look forward to a contented and relatively peaceful final stage of my life.



2012. Me with my second husband having coffee at Beales in Bournemouth.

11. A LIFE LIVED

Life by myself has been a bit dull, but I've adjusted well. I have friends and keep in touch with my children and grandchildren, and regularly speak to my best friend in Norwich. Staying active and interested in what is going on in the world is essential, and we look forward to visits from our nearest and dearest. Of course, having something good on TV, and seeing all the good movies in the winter is vital!

I've had plenty of time to reflect on the places I lived in during my overseas life. It saddens me that as unexciting as Aden was for us, it was better than it seems to be now, which is totally chaotic.

It was an ominous feeling when war broke out between the government proxies and mercenaries on one side and the local rebel militia groups on the other. Britain bailed in the end as Aden was only really important to them strategically, in military terms. Everyone from abroad got out. It doesn't seem like things are much better there now.

Not much seems to have been written about or by the ex-pats who were there at the time, even though we played an important part in Britain's national story. That's one of the reasons I wanted to tell my version of events. A couple of years ago the TV series 'The Last Post' shed some light on the later years in Aden.

At this particular stage in my life, religion doesn't mean much to me. I'm not sure it ever did. As much as it was a necessary step while I was in Ireland in order to fit in, I don't

think my heart was ever really in it. It always seemed as though Catholicism was an institution set up by men and for men, but women were the ones propping it up.

Sometimes it felt a bit more important, particularly in periods when I felt an urge to 'atone for my sins' and deal with the guilt I felt over the times when things had gone wrong. It helped at the time, but I have no interest in it now, and few regrets.

There have been moments of great joy in my life. Passing the medical exams to further my career has always been hugely important to me, particularly the ones that helped me graduate from Trinity, as they were hard but essential.

Moments of real sadness have also crept in. Losing my father was hard, but I didn't know him as well as I knew my mother. When she passed away it was particularly tough. I'm thankful for the time I had with her. More recently I have lost Mike and Teddy but eventually became resigned to their deaths. It's part of the ageing process to which we all succumb in the fullness of time.

I'm grateful for the good relationship I have with my sons. And tree grandchildren. They're each very different, and despite the disintegration of Nicholas and Marianne's relationship, he continues to be a good father to Genevieve, and Simon has been a good father to his children.

Marianne and I are great friends and I can always rely on her support. Other than Simon's occasional fondness for going to interesting restaurants in remote places, both my sons are easy-going and relaxed, always up for a walk with the dogs, and not self-conscious about social status. They had their difficulties with education, but Simon has since become a good

businessman, going by the fact that he always seems to be on the phone with a potential client whenever I call or, more likely, 'skype'! I'm pleased he is doing well. Nicholas seems happy, too, and has been able to support himself and his family. I can't ask for more than that!

My grandchildren continue to do a whole range of things. Nicholas' daughter Genevieve is interested in fashion and fabrics and works for an industrial fabric outlet, while Jasmine, Simon's daughter with a high-pressure job in Silicon Valley lives in California with a husband who works for Google. Her brother Julian has settled in Colorado and works for a company that does environmental monitoring of flora and fauna. They all seem content and I enjoy the times I have with them.

There is much about the 21st century that has not felt positive. I've often naturally been a 'small - c conservative,' something which has felt at odds with those around me at times. I feel very strongly that we were right to leave the European Union, as I believe we were over-paying our way by being a net contributor. As someone who is proud of Britain, I feel that we shouldn't be pushed around by France and Germany. I have always admired people who stand up and get things done and have the gift of the gab, something I've never had, and I felt Nigel Farage had that about him. I certainly feel that he helped to 'wake me up.' GB News' is my favourite news channel.

That said, I do believe that as a nation we should be on good terms with others and that we should limit how often we push other countries around. I have a lot of respect for how Germany manages its economy as I think they have an

apprenticeship model that encourages learning and hard work.

I'm more mellow on the issue of decolonisation. I know that we almost certainly exploited people, but I wasn't conscious of it when it was happening. We had 'house boys' and ayahs who worked for us while we were overseas, but we always had a good rapport with them.

On the whole, I had no objection to colonial life as I felt it was good for us and there were benefits to the indigenous populations, such as health, education, and transport infrastructure. It was of it's time.

However, when independence movements beckoned, I accepted them. On looking back I can see that the main impediment to progress was 'tribalism.' It saddens me at times, as I feel that places such as Kenya have not done so well since colonialism ended, but at the time it didn't worry me, and I feel like we did as well as we could to manage the transition.

I always knew we would have to come home one day. I've never had much desire to go back. In the intervening decades, I've enjoyed reading books about various independence movements, including those that took off in India and Pakistan. I love historical books and films about the empire, such as Viceroy's House, and Jewel in the Crown. It is sad to see how poorly- managed the departure from India and Pakistan was. Britain was too much in a hurry and too poor to continue 'the Raj' in the end. I also like reading about American politics and have recently enjoyed a book about the life of Hillary Clinton.

A brief hospital admission that I had last Christmas at least exposed me to more young people, which was refreshing for a while, but it was followed by the death of a very good friend, a Jewish lady who lived in the same sheltered-housing complex.

This is a modest chapter of my life, and as much as my far-flung family checks in on me to make sure I'm alright, I'd like them to have a fuller sense of what went on with their mother and grandmother. That is why I want them and others to know that many years ago, I had a more interesting existence in what were very interesting times. I especially hope that people will be more magnanimous towards the past than they are now. Little more can be said other than 'they were what they were.'

We were a peculiar class of people, those who donned khaki and were given only the basics to live on in such strange places, but we carved out a future for ourselves, never reflecting on whether or not we should have been there.

I have always wanted to make the best of things. I think I did.

I know I did.

J. Wilcox, September 2022.

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