

Gwen Wilson

Becomer's Mystery Person of the week - January 18, 2011

Born in a desert area of South Africa "Little Karoo"

Eldest child. As a young child I remember walks in fields of Calla Lilies in the Cape province

At 6, the family moved to Northern Rhodesia (now called Zambia) and this is where I attended school living in the town of Nkana-Kitwe.

Annually we would travel by car to South Africa to my grandfather's farm in Cullinan (the town where the Cullinan diamond was found).

My mother was one of 11 children and so we had oodles of cousins for this annual gathering - we all slept in tents as the little adobe farmhouse was void of plumbing or electricity and was very small.

My favorite memories are of watching the aunts baking big loaves of bread and fruit pies in the outdoor oven, while others churned creamy milk, (freshly milked by the farm hands) into butter and buttermilk.

We ate our meals at long trestle tables set under an enormous mulberry tree.

A spring of sweet fresh water, ran along the side of the farmhouse and this was our drinking water. For bathing we all swam in the dam, with the very muddy bottom.

December is summer in Africa and this is also the rainy season. This meant on our drive down to S.A., the rivers would be swollen and over flowing the bridges. So, to make sure the bridge was navigable, a man would have to walk in the water on the bridge, leading the vehicles through, with the possibility of the man or the vehicles being swept off the bridges into the rivers. Keep in mind the rivers in Africa have crocodiles and hippos.

Summertime was also picnic times and we always picnicked by the river side, always watchful for crocs or hippos and we children were only allowed to swim where there were hot springs, as the crocs and hippos stayed away from these.

Because Nkana-Kitwe was a copper mining town, everyone who lived in the town (except for commercial ventures) was employed by the mine. There was a huge club house with pool and all town activities took place there.

As teens we looked forward to Saturdays, when we all went to the "Bioscope" and in the evenings to the local church hall, where we had soft drinks and danced until our parents came to pick us up.

After graduation I took the train to Southern Rhodesia (Now Zimbabwe) where I was to start of 4 year training program as a registered nurse. The train crossed over Victoria Falls and finally brought me to Salisbury, where I was very frightened, this being my first time to be on my own.

There must have been 20 of us young ladies all starting nursing at the same time and we all lived in the Nurses Home - off limits to all outsiders and well guarded by a Matron. We were only allowed a pass to leave the Nurses Home once a week, after obtaining a pass and then we had to be in by 9pm.

On completion of the RN training, I and 2 friends boarded an Italian cruise ship in Beira, Portuguese East Africa (now Mozambique) and sailed up across the equator (where we were crowned Neptune's princesses), though the Suez canal and finally landed in Venice. We spent a

week in Rome and at that time, having run out of money, boarded a train that took us through Europe, crossed the English Channel and finally arrived in the lovely English countryside of Kent, where we were to start a year's training to become midwives.

The grounds of the hospital in Kent and the nurse home was surrounded by apple orchards and was also very near to where Churchill had his primary home "Chartwell."

We were paid a small stipend while in training and saved all our money for our days off, when we walked in 6" heels to the station (one mile away) and then took the train into London, to explore all the sights. We never bought snacks or food while on our outings as money was very scarce - consequently when we got back to the nurses home, we were ravenous. We were always provided with very good three-course meals at no cost to us. On our days off, breakfasts were delivered to us in our individual rooms.

While working in the newborn nursery, I met my future husband, who was the resident that came to check the newborns' hips. We dated for the year of my training and then he asked me to marry him.

Because I wanted to make sure that this was a sincere decision, I decided to go back to South Africa for a year and, if at the end of that time, we both still wanted to marry one another, then it would take place.

During the year I was in S.A., my darling Dan wrote to me every day and in May 1965, I returned to England, prepared to get married.

We were married June 1965, by Rev. Martin Lloyd Jones at the Buckingham Gate Church (near Buckingham Palace) and promptly left for Paris for a week's honeymoon and then on return to UK, prepared to leave for our immigration to Montreal, Canada, where Dan was to take on a post as research fellow at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

We had a small apartment halfway between the town of Montreal and the hospital (walking distance to both) and I was employed at the neurological institute as an RN. I worked at this until our first son was born a year later.

When our son was one, my husband took a post at a New York hospital and we rented a home in Canarsie, Brooklyn, the end of the line of the underground and where reputedly the mafia dumped the bodies!

After our second son was born (at Coney Island Hospital) we bought our first home on Long Island and lived by the beach for 14 years. However, the goal was always to get to California and we finally made it 1979.

We (all 4) traveled out of the USA every year and some of the countries visited, included Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Cook Islands, Fiji, Tahiti, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Japan, India, Sri Lanka, Argentina, Chile and much of Europe.

Both sons are now grown, one a doctor and the other a priest and my dear husband has gone to be with the Lord after 43 years of marriage.