

*'The Land of the Lake'*

## Part 8

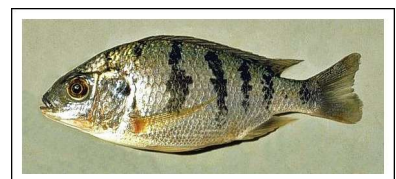
*By Mary Brill*



Fort Johnston was a very nice posting we were given a lovely little clover leaf bush house, with two very pretty bedrooms and a large lounge as well as a bathroom and toilet. The kitchen was a rondavel outside with a Dover stove to cook on. Ronald did the cooking and Handwatch was houseboy. Handwatch came with us to Zomba and was with us at Ryalls Hotel, quite amazing how they knew we were back and soon arrived to start work for us again. I bought curtain material for new curtains which I quickly sewed on my sewing machine, the bedroom curtains looked very pretty and I made bedspreads to match. I felt very pleased with my new home; it was great fun having such a nice place.

We made plans to make a nice garden and grow vegetables with the help of a lot of leaf mould which we found on some waste ground under a wall next door plus lots of watering. Reg rigged up a very good watering system and our garden was our pride and joy and very much talk of the town, so to speak. Bill Lamborn's father lived next door to us, he admired the vegetables, we gave him some as well as to friends who visited us and we made a lot of friends whilst we were there. It was a very nice life with lots of nice people around us; there was a small clubhouse and a tennis court. Lots of us played tennis and we used to visit the club in the evenings for a drink and a game of snooker, which was very popular.

Most days about 4.00pm we were able to borrow a boat and go out fishing on the River Shire, which flowed out of the lake and so wonderful in the early evenings. There was plenty of fish to catch and some wonderful birds to see, including pelicans, although we had to watch out for hippos. So it was



fish for supper most nights. We had it fried, grilled, pickled and curried and all other ways! There was the lake fish called Chambo and it was very good to eat.

We used to be able to get some meat from the market but it had to be minced as it was so tough. Meat was a real luxury in those days, sometimes you could get quite nice lamb or goat. We did get a bit of fruit and plenty of bananas. Bill's father would often call and take Maggie and I up to his house in the hills at Kuchowe, there he had a lovely garden and a small dipping pool, but the water was freezing cold, running down fresh from the mountains, and then through the gardens. It was a really lovely place. Reg and I used to visit for the day when Bill was staying for the weekend. A rest was always had in the afternoons when it was so hot during the day. Then, halfway down the hill at Fort Johnston Dr Lamborn had an orange grove so on the way back home we collected oranges, lemons and tangerines, all most welcome.

Rob was now seven so he had to go away to school in Blantyre where he was a boarder. I used to drive him down in our little Hillman Husky. I had an accident on one trip so we decided to sell it and get a larger car. I had quite a few adventures on these trips, broke down once and was lucky some kind men came to the rescue. We missed Robert a lot but he always home for holidays. It was always a sad day when he had to return to school. We



had some lovely days out on the Lakeshore taking a picnic or going up to visit our friends who included Dr Fitzmaurice, usually on a Sunday. Sometimes Rob would go back to school on the Beaver aircraft. I got a job as a Central African Airways agent or as they call them now "Reps", this was when the regular employee, Peggy Borley, was on leave. Sometimes the pilots came

to lunch and he would bring us goodies from Blantyre. They were good at helping with the weight sheet list when we had passengers and luggage. It was great fun and Maggie used to come to the aerodrome with me.

During 1957-58 whilst at Fort Johnston I helped with the census, this I got paid for. I had to travel miles along the lakeshore visiting all the white settlers as far as Monkey Bay and Cape Maclear. Taking all the forms out to the people and helping them fill them in, then collecting them all. It took quite a long time but I met some very interesting people and made many friends, Handwatch and Maggie came with me.

Dr Fitzmaurice and Walter Seymour became very good friends. Walter had always been a great hunter and had a great many tales to tell. He used to make the children laugh with the way he used to use his fingers and hands to describe his elephant adventures. He used to go out shooting game with the house boy and cut up the meat and make Biltong, which the children loved. He told us about his life as a lumber jack in Canada, then how he came to Africa, first to Rhodesia, then to Nyasaland and this small house on the lake shore. Walter again came into our lives when we came home again to England and Cornwall where we found him living in a hotel in Falmouth. We often used to visit him and he used to come to visit us at Killigarth. We were at his ending, a sad day to say farewell to a wonderful man and a great character never to be forgotten.



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We also met a painter called Helen MacLaren. She also lived on the lakeshore with her Italian husband, near to Monkey Bay. I can remember having lunch with them when we had minestrone soup with lots of grated cheese, Parmesan I expect. Also on the lake shore were two fishing families, one a Greek and the other Portuguese whom we used to visit. I remember supper with them when I had soup (which tasted like cod liver oil) and whole grilled fish still with the eyes in! I remember their son who was then about five years old scooping the eyes out with his fingers and eating them. Maggie looked on in horror but

they were wonderful times spent with such hospitable people. All the lake shore dwellers came into Fort Johnston to do their shopping and they would visit us for lunch when I would make fish curry or I pickled fish for them.

An old timer called Tommy Hughes, once a captain on the lake steam ship "Gwendolyn" taught me how to pickle green mangoes so that they tasted like pickled walnuts. They had to be dried out in the sun first to make them go brown, soaked in brine and then pickled. A few months later Reg was a pall bearer at Tommy's funeral, on a pouring wet day he slipped on the mud, nearly joining Tommy in the grave! These were exciting times with always something happening. During this time Reg had to go away to the copper belt in Northern Rhodesia with a company of the Nyasaland Police during the riots there and was away for some six to eight weeks, it was quite a lonely time for me so it was thank goodness again for so many wonderful friends.

*To be continued*