

GRANNY'S BOOK

'The Land of the Lake'

Part 1

By Mary Brill

It was in 1949 that Reg and I packed our things to take to Africa. In May he left to start a new life for us. The ship he sailed on was the Cape Town Castle. He had an exciting trip to Cape Town, after reaching land and the wonderful view of Cape Town from the ship at



early dawn was just superb. A few delightful days touring the Cape, seeing sights and exceptional views from Table Mountain. The fairest Cape is really beautiful. Reg then

boarded the train, which was to take him through the Karoo, and some of the dullest countryside through which to travel.

After Johannesburg the countryside improved. But by this time Reg was taken ill with a tummy bug, which got worse and worse until he had to be taken off the train at Port Herald in Nyasaland. He was transported by ambulance to Blantyre Hospital. Where he was treated for dysentery, which had got a hold of him so badly they thought he might die. With a lot of care and very good nursing he got better and went to stay with an Agricultural Officer and his wife, Archie and Mary Forbes, who were most kind to him.

When he was better Reg was sent to Rivi Rivi, Balaka, leaving the civilisation of Blantyre and Limbe to start clearing land at Rivi Rivi. He drove up the Matope road, a dirt road all the way. Elephants were often seen on the road at certain times of the day. If in a playful mood they could overturn your car. But during the year 1950 we never encountered them on the road. During the rains the awful ruts and mud on the road could make travelling very difficult and often the car would completely turn around and end up facing the other way; quite frightening at times!

Reg lived in a small African built hut with a thatched roof and mud walls. Then as the clearing of the land for growing crops progressed he made plans to build a house for us to live in. He sent me reports of its progress and photographs so I was able to get some idea of the house we were going to live in when I arrived out there. This house on the farm Reg was building was built of bricks made on the farm by the Africans who worked with Reg on the farm. All the timber was cut from the trees felled as the land was cleared; this was done mostly by hand. An African carpenter cut all the roof trusses and made doors, beds, tables and chairs for us. Until then most of our furniture was made from petrol boxes. (We still have one table, which we have kept for fifty years). We also had four large boxes made for us with open crates to protect them. These we used for all our moves in Africa.

Our son, Robert, was only one year old when his dad left for Africa in May 1949, in December Rob and I left the only home he had known during that one and a half years of his life. Mum and Reg's Uncle Chris saw us off on the boat train to Tilbury Docks where we boarded the Union Castle ship "Llanstephan Castle" bound for Cape Town and round the east coast. Las Palmas was our first port of call and then on to Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London, Durban, Lorenzo Marques and finally to our destination Beira. The voyage

started with a very stormy night across the Bay of Biscay. After two more days sailing the weather got much warmer but down the West African coast the weather was uncomfortably hot and sticky. We only had a small inner cabin with no porthole, which made it worse. By the time we reached Ascension Island we were well used to the



life on board ship and had made a few friends, there was one lady and her son of ten, who were going back home to Durban. The other friend was, like me, going to join her husband in Kenya; she would leave the ship at Mombassa, which would take about two days from Beira. Well, after picking up a few deck passengers, we sailed on for another day or so to St Helena, where the deck passengers disembarked. Here we were able to go ashore on a tender (a small boat), which we had to board from the ship gangways, rather tricky if the sea was rough. Whilst in St Helena we were able to climb Jacobs Ladder to the top of the island, giving us wonderful views over the South Atlantic. After St Helena we sailed for another two days arriving late on Christmas Eve in Cape Town having celebrated an early Christmas on board. Christmas day for Rob and I was a bit lonely sitting on a beach at sea point, with my Durban friend and her son, all thinking of our families far away. I had very little money to spend during the trip, about £30 I think. That would never last a week now in 2003.

After Cape Town it was another three weeks run up the South African east coast visiting Port Elizabeth, East London, Durban and Lorenzo Marques. In Durban we visited my friend's home and spent a day or so shopping, one evening they took me out to dinner.



One thing I remember so well was how friendly people were, they made one feel very welcome in their homes and being so kind to a complete stranger. This I was to find throughout the rest of my life in Africa.

We sailed on to Beira. Reg was unable to meet us so were met by an agent who was wonderful helping me to clear customs with the luggage and then arrange transport to the train on which we had to spend the next two days. This was overnight and one day to Limbe, Nyasaland, quite a long journey all on your own with a small child. We had quite comfortable bunks to sleep in and nice clean sheets, really not much different to the ship but I had to get my land legs back again after five weeks at sea.

We had to cross over the Portuguese border during the night. We were woken up when they collected immigration forms and looked at our passports. All meals were served on the train and I can remember how all the food tasted smokey because it was cooked on a wood burning stove. As we ate our soup in the evening flying insects were dropping into it so these had to be scooped out. These flying ants were eaten by the Africans who considered them a great delicacy. Anyway we coped with it all, hot and tired we arrived in Limbe, Nyasaland - what great excitement and a few tears, wonderful for Reg and I, to at last be together again but our journey had not yet ended!!

TO BE CONTINUED