GRANNY'S BOOK

'The Land of the Lake'

Part 4

By Mary Brill

Sadly, Mzuzu I did not like at all, most of the time it was in cloud, it was damp and miserable and when a swarm of bees took over our caravan it was back to the tent. At least we enjoyed the honeycomb! We did have more company though, quite a lot of expats were there busy building houses but, unfortunately, their drinking and partying went on late into the night often keeping us awake. In the end, when feeling very pregnant we moved to Kasungu in the Central Province for about a month before we went on UK leave. We were staying in a small rest house there which we shared with another agricultural officer, Ivan Lewis. The weather by then was hotting up for the rains and we had to sleep with all the doors and windows open. We had to put empty petrol tins across our doorway to stop wild animals sneaking in during the night, but the only thing that awakened me was a mouse eating paper in the cupboard. It was quite amusing because I awoke petrified thinking it was a snake - I just froze and didn't dare get out of bed. However after a while it seemed to go away and I got back to sleep but it wasn't until the next morning that we established it had only been a tiny mouse!

So it was home to UK on leave, to Beira in Mozambique by train, then the "Bloemfontein Castle" and sailed to Southampton. Then to Lincoln, my mother's home, where we stayed with my aunt, Maggie Stokes. It was Easter 1952, on the 1st of March when my daughter Margaret Jane was born weighing in at 7 lbs. Needless to say she was a dear little baby and I was so thrilled and with a natural birth to have such an adorable baby girl. Rob was just as excited as Reg that it was a girl and there developed a great bond between them. She loved her big brother and she could never take her eyes off him, you could see so much love they had for each other and as they grew up they ever hated to be parted.

Two months after Margaret (Maggie) was born it was back to Africa and we decided to stay there where we felt things could only get better for us in Nyasaland. We returned by way of the good ship 'Umtali', a relatively small cargo/passenger ship on which we were to travel all the way to Beira in Mozambique. It was two weeks to Cape Town followed by another two weeks up the east coast to Beira. However, when we arrived in Durban Reg got an urgent message to fly up to Blantyre. I felt very angry that I should be left to travel the rest of the way on my own to Beira. Indeed, I felt quite fearful and I wondered how I would manage on my own with two small children. I was soon to realise just how wonderful things having friends can be. The women on the ship rallied round to help me, one lady of seventy took on the role of ironing and another took on the role of washing nappies. Others helped by taking care of Rob whilst I tended to Maggie and did my other chores. This way they kept me sane at a time I was feeling quite low and let down. The agent at Beira was most helpful too. As, with two children, I was unable to go down to the

docks and clear my luggage through customs ready for onward travel, he did it for me and arranged a taxi to the train and there were my kind friends waving me goodbye. I will never forget those wonderful people who I will never see again but I have a photograph of them.

The baby Maggie progressed well but it was a long time before she could say Robert and she always called him Woppit! So they both grew up in Africa and all together we thoroughly enjoyed every minute of living in that very wonderful country. Such beautiful sacred memories preserved since childhood are indeed an education to be carried throughout life. Our staff, cook and house boy kept on their employment with us and they, too, spent time looking after the children. I was so lucky to have such faithful staff who stayed with us for the rest of our days in Africa and I will always retain my fond memories of them.

TO BE CONTINUED