

# A Police Officer's Family Life, 1954 to 1965

by Sheila Bevan

*(Note: Reproduced here from Volume 1 of 'Expatriate Experience of Life and work in Nyasaland' by Colin Baker, with the kind permission of Mpemba Books, owners of the copyright.)*

Trevor and I arrived in Nyasaland in 1954 on a transfer from Singapore. There could hardly have been a greater contrast. Singapore was (and is even more so today) a buzzing, sophisticated, cosmopolitan city with a busy sea port. Here we were now in an inland country in the centre of Africa with a totally different pace of life - it used to be known as a 'Policeman's Paradise' as hardly anything ever happened here. But all that was to change over the next 10 to 11 years.

We reported to Police HQ in Zomba and were told Lilongwe was our destination so off we set with all enthusiasm to our new life. We did not get a house for a while so we lived at the Lilongwe Hotel. Apart from the Club, much socialising took place at the hotel so we got to know quite a few people very quickly - kindly locals wanting to meet the new Policeman and family. Our daughter, Marilyn, was 18 months old and took it all in her stride.

We were eventually given a brand new house. That is not as great as it sounds, as I think it must have been one of the first new houses to be built by someone who did not know much about fixing door frames and windows. Our first fright was when the so-called air brick fell out of the wall onto my pillow; luckily I was not in bed otherwise I would not be writing this. The next was a whole door frame which fell out into the passage; again we were lucky no one was hurt. The final straw was the burglar bars which were beautifully made to fit into the outside window space, but which were not attached to the wall in any way, so that all any potential burglar had to do was to lift the frame out and jump inside.

Soon we were given the 'old Police house', one of the oldest colonial type houses in Lilongwe: big rooms with high ceilings, nice polished floors and very comfortable. The floors were cement but years and years of sump oil being poured on and absorbed and polished to a dark colour were very practical and attractive.

We had some fun in this house in a different sort of way. One Saturday morning I was doing the washing in the little old Series 1 Hoover machine and suddenly there was no water. I tried all the usual tricks for an air block and no water came from any tap in the house. So I phoned Trevor - Saturday morning was working time in those days - and he phoned the PWD water chap who came round and was very puzzled and couldn't get any water either. So, very kindly he put in a temporary connection from where there had been new pipe laying and - Bingo - we had water at least for the weekend. Trevor came home and we went to see the new pipe and noticed there were two meters: one old one and one new. He fiddled with these for a bit and soon found that by turning one on he could make the other meter go backwards. For some unknown reason these two meters had been left. It was interesting to see what a productive vegetable garden we had with such a small water bill. We of course never let on and I often wonder if the next people did the same.

The next tour we were in Zomba, where our twin boys were born. Excitement and drama there. They arrived in the middle of a polio epidemic and we were carted off to Blantyre, as small premature babies and polio do not mix, and in any case the small Zomba hospital did not have enough nurses to cope. This lasted about two months. Before the tour was out we were sent to Limbe. It was a nice little house with fifteen terraces down to the Cholo road - not an ideal place for toddlers to learn to walk - so they soon learnt to slide down from one terrace to another instead.

Dr Banda returned to Nyasaland, and lived in Limbe and that is when our lives and everyone's lives changed and we are soon into the Emergency and curfews, etc. Trevor hardly saw the children over this period of intense political activity as he left the house each morning before the children were awake and returned when they were fast asleep in the evening. I can remember Marilyn saying one evening 'when am I going to see my Daddy?' Things got so bad that Dr Banda was arrested (Trevor was heavily involved in the episode) and put in prison in Southern Rhodesia. We then went on a much-needed leave to South Africa and England.

On our return Trevor was posted to Southern Division and we lived in Blantyre. Nice little house with a delightful garden made by the previous occupant who was the Vet. We were soon moved back to Lilongwe and in no time were settled in. The children were now all of school age and we were lucky as the house was next but one to the school - very handy. Nothing had been done to this large garden space so I decided to tackle it. With the help of willing prisoners we produced quite a respectable garden with a hedge round it and a vegetable plot. We planted mulberry trees which soon produced welcome fruit.

The children were given a lamb by a dear old chief which was probably against the rules but he insisted the gift was for the children so how could we refuse? The lamb was named 'Korsa' and thought he was a dog and he would follow the children round the garden and graze where they were playing. He was a menace as he loved geraniums and ate them right down to the roots. He thought nothing of jumping over the hedge into the vegetable garden and eating a row of lettuces. But the strange thing was he would not let an African touch him. We had to put him in a secure lock up for the night otherwise a leopard would have had him. The garden boy would be exhausted trying to catch him to put him to bed. So inevitably one of the children just had to call him and in he came like a lamb!

After independence we moved to Blantyre when Trevor took over the Southern Province and we had another house. The garden here needed only a bit of attention. It was a nice house in Sunnyside, our last in Nyasaland as we had decided that we needed to move on. The children were all at school in England and we felt we should make our home there. So in July 1965 we left. After some sad farewells and good send-offs, we drove out of Nyasaland by the same road we had driven in eleven years before.

*Sheila Bevan 2008*

*Sheila has also written the book below, as described and advertised by 'Amazon'.*

 <p><b>THE PARTING YEARS</b> A British Family and the End of Empire SHEILA BEVAN</p>	<p>How did the end of Empire affect a family steeped in British imperial traditions for more than four generations? Sheila Bevan's story begins when the British Empire still seemed in its heyday of world dominion, when the vast increase in territorial extent and political and economic power masked the forces of irrevocable change which would transform the face of the Empire within a single lifetime. Her grandfather had served in India. Her father was born there, fought in the Boer War and stayed to farm in South Africa and as a member of the comfortable white English-speaking Society, witnessed the apartheid state first-hand experiencing protest groups like the 'Torch Commandoes' and Black Sash. She married Trevor Bevan, a colonial police officer who had served in the British Southern African Police in Southern Rhodesia and was to join the administration of Eritrea and Somaliland after Mussolini's defeat, where he forged close relations with the Danakil and other peoples of the Red Sea coast. Their married life together was different but no less adventurous - Singapore, Nyasaland (Malawi), the United Arab Emirates and finally Yemen. This is the history of a family full of incident, shrewd comment and deep understanding of the problems of the regions all in the context of the twilight years of empire.</p>
---	---