

Life in Northern Rhodesia begins: 8th August 1963

[Note: Sometime in the fall of 2017, I lost the letter with the exact arrival date but it was probably the 8th and my first letter to my parents was on the 11th just before I started my first day of teaching.]

I arrived at 2:30 PM in the tiny Ndola airport. [New airports in major cities were built in years following.] "A young African chap picked me up at the airport and was very worried when I was the last to get through customs, just my luck! Anyway we stopped in Kitwe [spending] the first night in a lovely hotel [Lothian House] for government workers. The next day we shopped in Kitwe (very modern copper mining city) and [went] to Chingola to finish shopping and open my bank account (also a good sized town, although more resembling an outpost town than Kitwe). I arrived in Solwezi Friday afternoon just after school was out and met the fine staff members and headmaster -- a very fine and brilliant individual [Alex Nisbet] who for many years ran a mission school [Chitokoloki]."

=====

First few days in Solwezi and the Secondary School. [Letter written 11th August 63]

Home living. I am now settled down in Solwezi and preparing to start teaching tomorrow. Thus far everything has gone very well. As I may have told you, the other American here, **Bob Hammond**, had volunteered very nicely to share his quarters with me. The home is very lovely and only a few years old. We have a kitchen, with a separate room for toilet, two bedrooms and a large dining room and a living room. It is as nice as any American middle class home. Of course, we do not have electricity. But, Bob is very ingenuous and has taken care of that problem to a certain extent. He has wired the house and attached the wires to his car battery, so in every room we have dim lights. So unless you want to look for something or read, there is no need to carry the kerosene light into the room. I bought a good kerosene light that is excellent for reading with a very bright steady light. He has an excellent houseboy who cleans for him, washes his clothes, and cooks delicious food generally. The bread baked yesterday was as good as grandma makes. (Don't tell her as she may be insulted, but really it is a compliment as it was delicious.) HA!

Limited stores and unpaved roads. In many ways you think you are in the midst of modern city life, but **I have found out already that things happen that constantly jerk you back into reality that you are 100 miles out into the bush.** For example you don't run to the store and buy anything you want, although there are a few small stores in Solwezi. Keep in mind Solwezi is the administrative capital of the whole NorthWestern province. As far as I know, there are no paved roads in the province the size of one of our eastern states. However, don't get me wrong, the road from here to Chingola (105 miles) is excellent as far as dirt roads go. And, of course, is very level and wide! This leaves the subject of dust! It is now in the latter half of the dry season I understand, and the hot weather is ready to set in. When you go out on the roads, you come back covered with a red film of dust that hounds you.

The **climate** is excellent at this time. It is really as cool or cooler than Ohio, with actual chilly nights [in the summer]. I have three blankets on each night thus far. Later, however, I am told it gets warmer both at night and daytime. One thing, the heat is very dry and you don't get any cold days as you would in Ohio. They are as warm or hot as in summer. The people who picked me up in N'dola [a few years later, the hyphen in Ndola was dropped] told me what to buy to start out and set me out from equipment or clothes. As I mentioned I purchased a lantern and also blankets, sheets personal accessories and personal clothes that all the masters (teachers), headmasters and boys wear. This consists of -- and don't pass out, as it fits the climate and custom -- open neck sports

shirts, khaki shorts (similar to Bermudas) and knee socks. I felt very funny, but first night I was here I was invited next door to get acquainted with the teachers there and all the men teachers were dressed alike as far as design or clothes go. So I felt a little better. Oddly enough women never wear shorts, it is always the men and boys who always do, but wear cotton print dresses. (Safari dress if you have seen the picture.) Already in three days **I am beginning to feel at home** and I am sure that I will enjoy the year very much. . . .

Saturday (yesterday) I tried to orient myself to the school system and courses and in the afternoon we went down the road 22 miles [westward] to the mission station nearest, to see the city workers and one of the teachers play the soccer match with the elementary school boys. But, don't let the word "elementary" fool you! Most were 15 to 20 years of age and not children.

Last night the neighbours came here for supper and we had spaghetti after considerable difficulties. Keep in mind we naturally have a good wood stove, and kerosene refrigerators -- and lots of hot water for bathing which pleased me. Today I attended church with Bob which was a non-denominational one, with about eight people present and no regular minister. Here, in Solwezi you seem to be either pagan, Catholic or just Christian. (I was worried with the prospects(?) not being good for the church. But the Lord told me while I was in the church, as if an answer to prayer, that He would guide me and use me here if I would not let my ideas or your ideas get in the way. It seems as if we are meeting as the early Christians with no worry of a denomination, but only worshipping Christ and reading and praying in His name and then serving. And if this isn't the Church of God, I don't know what it is!

[A note about my religious beliefs and convictions in 1963. When I arrived in 1963, I was a very conservative evangelical. I had been a lay leader in two non-pentecostal Churches of God in Ohio, one most black and one mostly white. My convictions slowly evolved the longer I stayed in Northern Rhodesia / Zambia, with the hardest touches of my conservative beliefs softening as I became more ecumenical.]

I can read your mind already from what I said, that you are afraid that I will get mixed up with some denomination or in some unusual thing and not see the Church. But, mother (especially), please, keep in mind that my life here is quite different than in the States and that I do not have a choice of churches. And, if I don't go to church I have 200 boys watching me and classifying me as an unbeliever, as many of them are, I understand. One good thing which may be a way for the Lord to use me is that in the school there are classes in religious knowledge, and I am teaching the 60 new boys who have just come into the school. This will be a burden, but a way to help and opening, as many are anti-Christian and some others from mission schools very honest believers. . . . remember me in prayer that I can help in the school and church. (I am supposed to talk from the Old Testament this term.) I need the prayers of the saints that I may be wise in this time of unusual adjustment and I need no warning or admonishment as I feel my circumstances are far different than anyone there has been confronted with. With God's help much can be accomplished. I feel the Lord's presence and feel sure He has a work here for me among these boys in the secondary (high school). I will write later on how the school goes. Tell everyone I said hello and I will write them (if they write back) as soon as I can.

=====

Settling into Solwezi and school life (mid-August to mid-Sept. 1963)

18th August 1963. I regret it that it has been one week since I have written, but my first week of teaching has kept me unusually busy. . . . Anyway, all has gone well at school. I am enjoying working with the fellows very much. Some are very brilliant as I expected and will undoubtedly be the future leaders of the country. And others are not as good. All fellows are polite and except for being reminded about talking, little more discipline is needed. Truly they deserve to be complimented when one sees the conditions they study under in the evening. I went up to check the other night and they all were at work without supervision under terribly poor paraffin lamps (kerosene). I understand the only serious problems are when political leaders affect the boys, such as anti-European [white] feelings and they might get angry to go on strike. I hope I don't have any of this problem. Most classes are like teaching the 8, 9, 10 in the USA. And, as I said, the calibre of work with upper levels is high.

Mutanda. Other matters of interest, today after church I went with Bob and four other teachers (two married couples) to Mutanda River and Mutanda Mission School and Church for a picnic and swimming.

He (Bob) knows the people there, and after we picnicked along the river at a waterfalls (there are several ones very beautiful ones nearby), the people at the mission invited us for tea and cake. And so we talked for quite some time before going 22 miles back to Solwezi. Also this week on the social scene Bob had a three-way birthday party for himself and our neighbours. We had educational movies for the boys last night such as the Cup Finals of football in Great Britain. This is a rare treat for them as we can't get them often. And also the small generator for rare electricity at the school can't be used often. Also to complete my busy schedule, I attended the Bible study group that meets in houses on Tuesday nights which is a real blessing. . . . I'm out of room again. The skies are still sunny and cloudless – sun up to sundown.

Chingola, new car and school library (25th August 1963)

Another exciting week has passed. I just got back this afternoon from visiting the big “city” of Chingola. We get a weekend off every 3 weeks. I told Bob that I never thought I would be so glad to see [big-ish] shopping areas in my life after living in Cleveland. The amount of stores in Chingola (40,000 population) wouldn't equal ½ the May Company if they were all put together. Anyway, I did a lot of shopping in few hours. The major things I got were a car and a typewriter! I bought a 1961 Morris Mini-Minor with 3,000 miles on it. The lady was moving to South Africa and had to give it up. She had used it for her shopping for two years. It cost me £380 (\$1,164). The typewriter cost me £19 (\$54). It is an office model. The Morris gets 45 miles per gallon. Gas costs 55¢ for an American gallon. . . . I also got clothes and supplies for a month. There are several little stores in Solwezi, but they are of poor [quality] and expensive.

The road in and back to Chingola was worse than anything you have seen in your life in respect to dust. It is 105 mile trip [on] dirt road (**red**). Anyway, when I arrived in Chingola, my white shirt was not white but **literally red**. You clean your glasses and they [are] dirty in a few minutes again. While I couldn't see my own, Bob's hair turned from brown to red. (I'm not kidding.) Anyway, we stayed overnight and the pillow was red the next morning. When I went to the barber, he could barely cut my hair! It felt like he was pulling it out because each hair with its hair oil had become so clogged. One good thing is it's level and straight. (But of mud I understand from November to March.)

I shouldn't have much trouble when I go in next week to take my driving test and pick up the car. (Here I have to get a new license to drive and take a new test.) Of course, we use the British system

of driving on the left hand side of the road -- with the steering wheel on the right. [**Special note: I did NOT end up having to actually take the driving tests and it was decided they would just accept my American license.**]

School Library. I have just been appointed as librarian of our sad library. We have few books. And, if you learn of any generous people with good books of any topic from religion to mathematics and car repair, we could use them. . . .

Limited newspapers and magazines. One never realizes how much he appreciates hearing from others until he is isolated from outside news (even the daily paper). If it wasn't for the international issue of *Time Magazine*, which comes weekly, I'd be lost.

My new (slightly used) car and a mashed finger (1st September 1963)

Again another week has rolled and as usual many exciting things have happened. . . .

[As I said in my last letter], I got my car on Friday night and it is a 1962 Morris, a Mini-Minor instead of a 1961. So I think I got a better buy than I expected. It costs here £530 (\$1,500) and I got it for £370 (\$1,050). It has only 3,100 miles. . . . The only disadvantage is the small tyres that hit every corrugation in the road. It was a real bump-bump trip back to Solwezi. Bob took two ladies and myself in [to Chingola]. and then he took off for a two week Physics conference in Salisbury, S.R. 500 miles away. [I] got back at 9:00 PM on Friday night.

We have had three exciting things: one "an invisible little man", bothers the fellows, which has been a case of mass hysteria, an epidemic of mumps, and a mashed left index finger. (That is why I am writing and not typing this letter.) I'll start with the last, knowing your first worry about my health.

I was in the butcher's shop in Solwezi on Saturday morning trying to do all the weekly shopping that Bob had been doing. [The shop] has double doors. And, as I was going out, an African lady was trying to come in suckle her child and carry groceries. So, being a chauvinistic gentleman, I tried to open both doors. While I was stretched out trying to keep both doors open, my left hand slipped in the door crack by the hinge and I felt my finger [getting squished]. But, I couldn't move fast enough to do a thing about it. Anyway, when I got it out, it wasn't broken but bruised on both sides with blood under the nail. [Back in Solwezi] I went to the nurse, after putting ice on it in the shop for an hour. She is used to all kinds of trouble and is quite a dry humorist. So, I asked her to drill the nail. And she, in her way, says perfectly seriously: "let's pull the nail off and you won't have one to worry about". I felt like poking her in the nose, but felt it wouldn't be Christian-like! I didn't feel very "jokey". She finally gave me 6 aspirin if it hurt too bad and sent me home after letting me read about the symptoms of mumps which all the young men on the faculty dread to get but probably will as we have no serum unless we decide to go 130 miles to the Kitwe next week. [Chuma] house is the worst with four cases out of 30 boys thus far. I think I have had shots for everything but mumps or have had all the diseases. Isn't it just the way. Pray that if I get [mumps]. Or you may never grandchildren! (This may not be a funny joke, but I can't do anything else about it!) Anyway, kept my finger on ice for hours and now it looks like I have a good chance of keeping the nail. . . .

I don't have room to tell you the exciting "little man" story, but that can come within the next fascinating story in the life of P.D. Wilkin -- turn in next week!

Despite these minor problems and troubles of mumps and fingers, I love my work here more each day and hope to stay as long as the U.S. Ed. Commission allows.

(8th September 1963). One more exciting week has gone by. So much has happened I could not begin to tell you all in three letters. . . .

Thus far I don't have the mumps and my finger is better. I may not lose the nail. . . . [Boys would like pen pals.] These boys, ages 13 to 20 and grades 7 to 12 have just been taught English before entering secondary school and are very interested in using this new language which to them is a sign of achievement. All we have available for them to read in the library in the way of something interesting are lurid adventures and westerns and other trash. Many are Christians and would read something better, but nothing is obtainable here. . . . As the newly appointed librarian, I know the value of such books would do much good. . . .

My letter's gone and I still haven't told you about the "invisible man" or, more important, a sad "riot" we had, but an exciting one for me that made me mature fast. The juniors were very angry at the seniors last week and threatened them. So I stayed in Chuma home with 20 boys to "protect" them. The other group came to the door at 10:00 PM demanding in. And I ended up blocking it with myself and talking to them; fortunately, they went away but before it was over 30 were suspended from school including some very fine young men who had temporarily been swayed by bad leaders.