

## Chapter 4 – London and Ghana

(1968 to 1970)

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(20<sup>th</sup> January 2013 – Penang)

## Between Bournemouth and London



Jenny gained her 1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours degree in Mathematics. It was well deserved, working towards it as she had, quite single mindedly at times over the last three years, unlike myself who had gotten involved in Student Union activities and become somewhat disillusioned by the Mech. Eng. course curriculum. And Jenny had a job to go to on graduation to boot. Back in the spring term of the final year, a group of us had attended an open day at IBM's Birmingham branch office on the Hagley Rd. Whilst there, we were given an aptitude test to complete, a measure of our suitability as potential computer programmers. Jenny walked the test and I, despite having taught myself FORTRAN, an IBM created computer language, failed. As a result, Jenny was offered a job in IBM's City Branch in London and the salary being too good to refuse, Jenny

had accepted the trainee programmer post offered. She was also offered a job as a trainee actuary with The Prudential Insurance Company, but the work seemed to be a little too stayed for her liking and involving statistics as it did, which she positively hated. She had set her heart on continuing at Birmingham to gain a PhD leading on to an academic career but the big bucks and opportunity to live in London was far too appealing to resist. Her Doctorate would have to wait.

I spent a good deal of time in the University's career office looking for a job after the degree results were posted. I must have sent off over 40 job inquires, for all sorts of positions in all sorts of companies but very few companies even bothered to acknowledge my letter, never mind offer me an interview. Seemed I had missed the boat, or the personnel officers might just have sensed my desperation. Only one company, British Aircraft Corporation (BAC), called me for interview and subsequently, when they offered me a job as a trainee stress analyst, I took it despite the work being totally analytical. I was stressed enough by not having a source of income and would have taken any job offered to me by that stage.

Lyn had also found a job in the City of London's banking section and she and Jenny moved into a flat together along Holland Rd, in Holland Park. My post with BAC was at Herne Airport just to the north of Bournemouth, 100 miles south west of London, but it couldn't be

helped, beggars can't be choosers'. Mum and Dad helped me find a studio flat in Bournemouth and also with the moving in, although I didn't have many possessions to speak of, all I had in the world, you could fit into a small suitcase. The flat was pretty basic being a single room with bathroom facilities shared with the rest of the inmates of the converted Victorian house. But it was easy walking distance to the town centre and the other guys and gals in the place were of the same age as me. One of the young women there was a private detective of all things and, as it turned out, another resident was also a new recruit to BAC too, a young engineering graduate of Indian decent. BAC provided a shuttle bus from the town to Herne airport which was handy since I couldn't afford a car, being stony broke, and I really didn't fancy cycling the 7 or 8 miles to work and back every day, even less attractive a proposition with the imminent onset of winter.

My first day on the job was a shock to the senses. The stress office was an open plan space with more than 60 men arranged in a grid square of desks and I swear they were all wearing white shirts. And I was expected to clock in and out every day. In truth I wanted to run away. This is not what I wanted at all. But what to do? Nowhere to run to. I wasn't going to go back to Darwen, no way. I would have to make the best of it but from that first day on I was looking for a way to leave. Jenny settled into her training program at the IBM centre in Bracknell with on the job experience in the City of London banks, customers of IBM's computers, on a starting salary of £1200 per year whilst I sat behind a desk overlooking an airfield with a slide rule for company on £800 a year. The only bright thing in my whole situation was my desk being by the window and I could watch the fighter jets take off and land.



At that time BAC was involved in the manufacture of three different types of passenger plane, the BAC 1-11, the VC10 and Concorde. Herne was the manufacturing plant for the 1-11 which was a short haul aircraft and the company's bread winner. It had a high tail plane and two rear mounted Spey jet engines. The assembly line for the 1-11 was the closest the company ever came to have anything approaching a production line, its big brother, the VC 10 being built almost as a

single plane one at a time in a hanger. My first actual piece of work was to calculate the stresses in the curved beam on to which the under-carriage doors of the 1-11 were hinged. Very exciting that was. Not. Oh look, another fighter just took off!! Take me with you, please.

Most weekends saw me on the train to London to go and stay with Jenny in Holland Park, but it wasn't long before it really became very difficult to get on the Sunday night train back

to Bournemouth and that clock in machine, not to mention all those men in white shirts waiting to greet me on the Monday morning. After exploring a few options on how we could be closer together, including Jenny giving up her IBM job and moving to Bournemouth to find a job as a math's teacher, a prospect that really didn't appeal to either of us, I approached the stress office manager to see if there was any chance of me getting transferred to the companies plant in Weybridge which was much closer to London. That at least would put Jenny and me within 20 miles of each other. To my surprise and eternal gratitude my boss said he would see what he could do, and within what seemed a very short space of time I was planning my move to the Weybridge plant.

*(30<sup>th</sup> January 2013 – Penang)*

Bournemouth wasn't all that bad really. Jenny visited a couple of weekends and as it had been her family's annual holiday town, she felt quite comfortable there. But six weeks after arriving I was leaving. For the first week or so after the move to BAC Weybridge, I stayed in Jenny's flat in Holland Park, sleeping on the floor of her room. It was quite a commute to Weybridge from there every morning and it wasn't long before I found a rented room in Surbiton about halfway between the Jenny's West End flat and Weybridge. What a strange place that was. The room was in a converted three storey Victorian town house, the owner of which was an elderly lady who lived in the basement flat and looked and acted as if she was still living in the Victorian era. All the rooms were let out to middle aged gentlemen who all seemed to have fallen on hard times, each with their own room with all facilities shared. No lady visitors allowed. My room was no room; it was a cupboard, twice the width of a narrow single bed and half as long again. The 'room' could barely accommodate a wardrobe as well as the bed and there was no way even a five-year-old could swing a mouse, never mind a cat in it. The miniature TV was on top of the wardrobe and the only comfortable way to watch it was by lying on your back on the bed! But it was cheap.

Ruth was now back at Birmingham on her final year after her year's placement in France. She was a frequent visitor to London to stay with Jenny on the weekends and we three would take to streets of London, viewing strange French films that were Ruth's passion and eating out at the new fanged pizza restaurants in Chelsea. We also had our gang of three's favourite restaurant in Knightsbridge, 19 Mossop Street. At every visit, I had the same dishes; prawn cocktail starter, sirloin steak main course, medium done, followed by ice cream covered in melted dark chocolate. If I like something then I like something, what can I tell you? It got a bit of a joke I suppose, Ruth and Jenny pouring over the menu each time we visited the place, looking for something new to try and me twiddling my thumbs wishing they would hurry up. Not like they didn't know the menu by heart, we went to the place so often.

Jenny and Lyn's relationship deteriorated somewhat over this period, not helped I suspect by our gang of three staying in Jenny's room practically every weekend and I don't remember ever inviting Lyn out with us on our city life adventures. The place in Surbiton

was not working either. I would still come up to London practically every night after work and only used the place as a sleeping off point on the way back to work the next morning. The late-night tube is an eerie place, I can tell you, and I was getting not just a little knackered with all the late nights and early mornings. The solution we decided was for us to rent a flat in Weybridge town and Jenny would commute each day to IBM training headquarters which, conveniently, was also on the west side of London. We had a joint income of around £175 a month, net, and we calculated that we could spend around £20 a month on a place, quite a lot to spend on a flat in those days. We found a place for £22.

In a very short time, it was a done deal and we moved to Layton Court, Weybridge, with a six-month contract, the first storey flat of an authoress. Lyn seemed relieved that Jenny was leaving and sadly we were never to meet her again, despite all the fun University times we had had together. I had to face the lady in the Surbiton basement. I would be breaking my six-month rental contract with her and she was entitled to ask me for the balance of the six months rent that I was reneging on. But she recognised young love and said, "OK then, I let you off, but just this once, mind."

Our new landlady took herself off to Egypt for the winter months each year to keep warm and no doubt gain inspiration for her next novel. Her flat was luxurious in the extreme by our standards. It boasted a pure white carpet, art on the walls, a fully furnished home in fact, just walk in and put the kettle on. She had left absolutely everything for us to use. This was Jenny and mine's first home together and boy what a first home to have. We loved it.

*(31<sup>st</sup> January 2013 – Penang (Morning))*

## Weybridge



VC 10

BAC Weybridge was a much better working environment than Herne had been. The job was the same, but my new colleagues were much the same age as myself and even included a couple of young women engineers. I arrived at the time the last VC 10 was being assembled in the hangers on the Brookland site. Quite an emotional time for the senior guys as this was their baby, the last totally British designed and built commercial jet airliner. The foreseeable

future belonged to Boeing and the Jumbo jet or so it seemed at the time. Britain had been the first country in the world to build a passenger jet airliner with the Comet back in the 1950s, but a series of fatal crashes blighted the aircraft's future. The cause of the crashes was metal fatigue failure in the airframe, a mode of failure not previously accounted for in airframe design and stressing. With the Comet came the first high altitude passenger flights

and the increased stress range imposed on the airframe caused minute cracks to develop in the aircraft's skin which after successive loading and unloading led to structural failure of the fuselage.

By the time I joined BAC, the way to design safe airframes was understood and all load bearing structures in the airframe were designed to the new fatigue criteria. But the damage had been done as a result of the horrific crashes and the Comet being seen as an unsafe aircraft was never a commercial success. The VC 10 was a visually beautiful airplane and had a very functional airframe design, with the four jet engines located



A Slide Rule

under an elevated tail plane, the wings and tail plane were clear to give maximum lift efficiency without the drag of wing mounted engines. The passenger experience was also much improved by the quieter cabin achieved by having rear mounted engines. There was speculation that the Russians had copied the design extensively for their own Tupolev Tu-134 and its variants. Probably true. But although the airframe design was near ideal aerodynamically, the new generation of turbo jet engines could not easily be mounted onto it. Jet engines are quite small in comparison and can easily be mounted under an elevated tail plane.

As the last VC 10 was in the assemble shop, my first job was to re-stress a part of the fuselage, a sort of last check of the airframes integrity before the drawings were put into storage. The modus operandi was to receive from my supervisor a set of loading data for a part of the fuselage gained from test flights of the VC 10 prototype, go to the drawing stores and recover the relevant paper component drawing(s), sit at my desk and calculate the stress the loads would cause in the geometry as defined by the drawings....with a slide rule. Of course, you have no idea what a slide rule is. Not unless you have become an engineer and are interested in the history of your profession. The slide rule was the engineers



Concorde

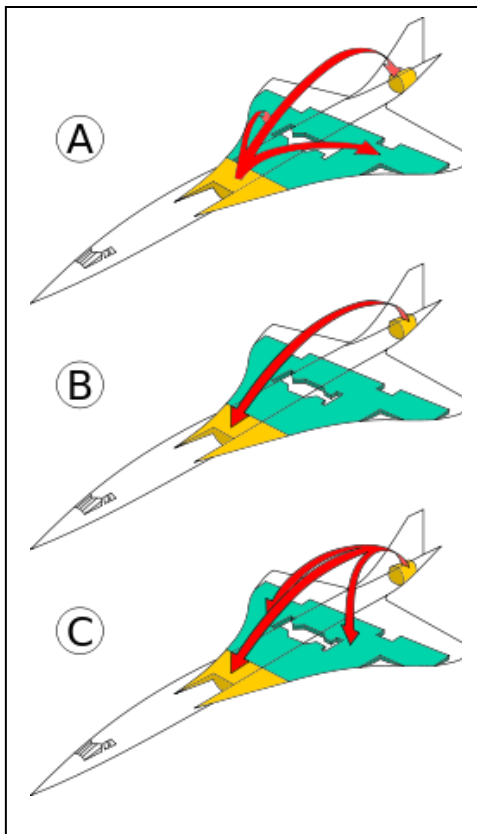
calculating stick with which, plus a piece of paper, he could and indeed, did put a man on the moon. Amazing to think that a whole aircraft could be designed using it, but they were. The principle is very simple. It uses logarithmic scales to effect multiplication by addition. OK, we will leave it there!! The process of stressing an aircraft frame using this stick took hundreds of thousands of man hours to achieve which required a lot of people like



me sitting at their desks day in day out for months on end to get the job done. Today, model an airframe on a computer, involve a handful of specialist engineers, job done.

The second assignment I was given at first seemed to offer more scope and be more interesting, Concorde. Concorde was about to take its maiden flight in early 1969. This was to be the answer to the Americans Boeing 747, a passenger jet that could fly at more than twice the speed of sound, Mach 2.2, which was up to three times faster than the 747, at twice the altitude thereby having reduced drag and achieving an associated improvement in fuel efficiency. Paris to New York in 3.5 hours compared to the 8 hours of a conventional aircraft. Very impressive. The part I was assigned to work on was the bulkhead between the passenger compartment and the aircraft's rear fuel tank. Again, it was a check-stress job as I was only a trainee. As Concorde moved through the sound barrier, to maintain the airframe's trim the centre of gravity had to be moved towards the rear of the plane by about 2 meters. To achieve this, fuel was pumped from the wings and a forward fuel tank to a tank in the tail, underneath the tail plane, the flow of fuel being reversed when the plane's speed fell below the critical mach speed.

Technically, this was unusual as most stresses arising from pressures in an airframe are the result of maintaining the cabin pressure for the comfort of the passengers at high altitude.



This pressure is normally accommodated in the tubular design of the airframe in much the same way as an inflated sausage balloon spreads the stress evenly through the balloons flexible skin. The skin of an airframe acts in much the same way and as you have probably noticed whilst flying through turbulence, the airframe moves to shift the forces around. The bulkhead between the fuel tank and the passenger compartment was more akin to a drum skin, with any difference in pressure on either side of the skin being accommodated by the bending of the skin, not good in terms of the best and safest way of handling forces. Best practice was always to try and achieve a pure tensile force in a structure to reduce the risk of failure due to the dreaded fatigue. Bending acts like a magnifier of stress in the material across a component's cross section causing a stress gradient that can result in the dreaded micro cracking and resultant fatigue failure.

By a funny quirk of nature, steel is the only material that, below a certain stress cycling level at less than half its tensile strength, will not fail through fatigue. All other materials, whether metals or polymers, no matter how low the cycling stresses are, will eventually fail.

This is true of aluminium; the basic stuff airframes are made from. As a result, airframes are given a safe working life in terms of the number of take offs and landings the frame can endure before metal fatigue becomes a dangerous issue. Take offs and landings result in the highest and most varied stressing cycles in the planes working life. If we could build planes of steel, no problem, but then they would be much too heavy to get off the ground.

Soon after the initial test flight in France, Prototype 001 was flown down the airfield at Brooklands just outside Weybridge where the BAC factory was situated. The runway was too short for Concorde to land on and so the whole of the factory's personnel lined the runway that day to watch the fly past. A great moment. It felt like you really were part of something big, even if only a tiny part yourself.

*(31<sup>st</sup> January 2013 – Penang (Afternoon))*

## Living Over the Brush

It wasn't long after we moved into together that Jenny started having a conscience about not telling her parents that she was now "living over the brush" with me in Weybridge. I still have no idea why it was such a concern for her apart from obviously not wanting to upset her Mum and Dad. She was afraid in particular that her Dad would find out from my parents that we were sharing the same address. And so it was decided after one of our frequent evening visits to our local pub at the bottom of our road, now pushed up and called The Grotto Inn (terrible name for a pub), that we would go back up north to break the news face to face and furthermore, impart our intention to marry just to make our cohabiting appear more respectable. Jenny decided that it couldn't wait till Christmas and so after alerting her Mum and Dad that we were on our way to stay for a weekend with some important news to share, we headed north.



Of course, the 'important news to share' set off all sorts of alarm bells ringing in Fred's head, the loudest being that Jenny was pregnant. In truth it never crossed our mind that he would jump to such a conclusion. The relief on the poor chap's face when all we had to tell him was that we had moved in together and intended to get married the coming spring was almost comic. I think he would have accepted anything we had planned now that he knew

he wasn't going to be a grandfather to a child born out of wedlock.

Jenny and I had clearly no money to spend on a traditional wedding, living each month as we did on our pay cheques with no chance to save any of it. We had decided in the pub that



we would get married in a registry office with just immediate family and close friends but even then, we weren't at all sure how we would fund the event. Jenny and I were in no way religious people and, apart from the cost of a church wedding and a full reception for both families, there was also the issue of being hypocritical by making our vows in church before a god we didn't believe in. But Fred was having none of that. After a very short discussion he offered to pay for the whole shooting match, church wedding, reception the lot. He would organise the event, organising being something that he excelled at, and we would turn up on the appointed day and play our part. A date was set, 12<sup>th</sup> April 1969 and we set off back to Weybridge relieved that the weekend hadn't been a mined field of sensitivities.

Life in Weybridge was very sweet. We had friends to stay in our spare bedroom, including Ruth of course, Chas, my mate from sixth form days who came with his wife to be, Richard down on a London job interview and we spent other weekends away at friends, notably Liz and Geoff, who after their marriage in summer had moved into married quarters on the Tangmere RAF base. On one of our visits there, it was agreed that Jenny and I would buy their old car, a 1954 Ford Popular of the early 'sit up and beg' design, the 103E. Our first car and at only £25, even this was too expensive for us to buy with a one cash payment. Liz and Geoff kindly agreed to let us pay them over 5 months at £5 a month.



E-Type Jaguar

Having our own wheels was freedom unparalleled. We were no longer confined to Weybridge at the weekend but could go explore. No more lugging the weekly shopping up the hill and definitely no more walking home in the rain from work. In the stress office the little pop attracted not a little mirth from my new colleagues. Most

of the other younger stress analysts were on contract to BAC and their salaries were, because of this and their previous experience, in excess of twice mine. Some of the lads had even worked in the USA for the likes of Douglas and Boeing. All of them had nice wheels. Ray, who was my best mate in the office, had an E-Type, one of the most beautiful, if not the most beautiful, car ever made. Totally raw power with 300 BHP under that gorgeous bonnet, 0 to 60 in 7 seconds and a top speed of 150 mph. My Pop had 30 BHP under a brick shaped bonnet and never reaching 60, even with a following wind to assist. Some days I would deliberately park my Pop next to Ray's E-Type in the company car park. A Cat can look at a Queen, right?

*(2<sup>nd</sup> February – Penang)*

## Getting Married

12<sup>th</sup> April came around awful quick. The lads in the stress office decided that I should have a stag night. I wasn't that keen, but they insisted on a night out. One of the guys managed to get five free entry passes to the Playboy Club in London, the home of the Bunny Girls. How to say no? It was decided that we would travel up to London in my Ford Pop, all five of us. I had volunteered not to drink and be the driver. No objection did I hear. The night was indeed very memorable, being served ridiculously expensive drinks by topless, long legged women, how could it not be? The guys just disappeared into the bars and casinos, but we needed not have been bothered about the drink/drive issue, we couldn't afford to get tipsy at these prices, never mind drunk. On the drive home back to Weybridge in the early hours of the morning, we were pulled over at a police check point, but they waved us on once they saw we were not up to any mischief.

Jenny had decided that she would make her own wedding dress and that of Ruth's, the intended matron of honour. I don't think Ruth wanted to be referred to as 'the bridesmaid' although 'matron of honour' doesn't sound brilliant either. Mark was to be my best man and the event was to be formal enough for all the major male performers to be kitted out in top hat and tails. My dad in top hat and tails? I never thought he would agree to dress up like a penguin but, bless him, he did.

Ruth came to Weybridge for her dress fittings, all the way from Birmingham. All a little fraught towards the end because Ruth's mobility was becoming more and more affected by her worsening back condition and the dress style Jenny had chosen wasn't very flattering. Ruth has a degenerative spine condition which, at times, causes her to walk with a distinctive lean to one side. As for the wedding ring, Jenny and I sought out the cheapest gold band we could find from the local jewellery shops. We found one for £11. Cheap as chips. And that was about our only input into the whole event, apart from going to visit the vicar who was to marry us. Jenny agreed to love and honour but drew the line at obeying me. Two out of three aren't bad so I settled for what I could get.



Jenny the Bride

When the wedding day dawned, I was a nervous wreck, my sleepless night not being helped by the night's violent spring storm. Howling winds and lashing rain all night and the storm was still having its last gasp when the limo came to pick us up at 10 o'clock the next morning. Evidence of the night's storm was everywhere and nowhere more so than in Edgerton high street, the village in which we were to be married. Just up the road from the church the wind had brought down a huge tree that now lay across the road leaving only enough

room for our limo to pass by mounting the pavement. Was this a sign I should take note of, I wondered?

Mark and I took our place at the front right of the church with all the relatives ranged behind us. I think our marriage was the first of our generation in both families. Since Jenny and I had been an item for getting on for 6 years by this time, all Jenny's uncles and aunties and their children already knew me well. And the same was true of Jenny for my family but perhaps not quite was much, since we Whitworth's and Ribchester's were not known for excessive socialising with each other. Jenny arrived promptly at my side on her Dad's arm and the ceremony began.

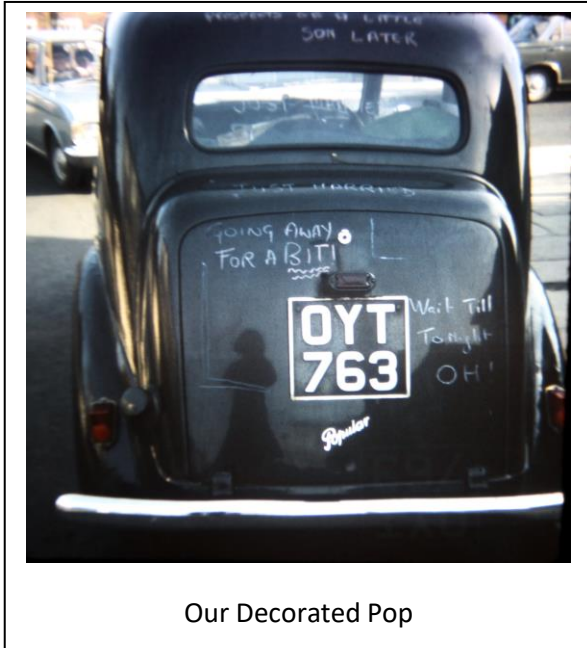
I fluffed my lines, of course. All I had to do was to repeat what the vicar had said, and I couldn't even get that right. Never mind, a bit of entertainment for the assembled guests. The wind was still creating a ruckus outside the church with the odd rubble of thunder thrown in but as soon as we arrived at the church door, post signing the marriage documents in the registry, the sun came out and the clouds were chasing each other away across a bluing sky. All was well.



A Motley Crew

The reception was held at the Last Drop in Bromley Cross, a posh event venue for the whole of Bolton. Now my family, notably Mum's brothers, were known for liking their beer perhaps a little too much. Before the day, I had visions of the two families squaring up to one another in the bar, but it didn't happen and after the meal and usual speeches and all that, Jenny and I escaped in our little Ford Pop, heading south. Of course, Mark had been up to some mischief. The back of the car was covered in red lipstick writing announcing to the entire world that we were just married, and he had also tied cans on long strings to the back bumper. At Jenny parent's house we stopped to pick up our bags and undo all the stuff Mark had done to the car. Lipstick doesn't come off that easy though, it was visible there for weeks. Turns out he also put coins in the hub caps which made a terrible noise. Took me a little while to figure out what he had done. Didn't give him the coins back.

We hadn't the money for a honeymoon and intended to just treat ourselves to a night in a four-star hotel in Manchester's Piccadilly Square. We hadn't pre booked and were really disappointed that there was no room at the inn for us that night. We decided to head on to Buxton and find somewhere to stay the night in the town. The Queen's Hotel in Buxton had



Our Decorated Pop

been, in its day, the premier place to stay in the spa town but now it had an air of faded elegance. By the time we arrived that day it was getting a little late but, still, they had a room for us. Here was Mark's last throw as the joker. He had stuffed confetti into my wallet and the pockets of my jacket. As soon as I opened the wallet up at the hotel's reception a rain of coloured paper littered the desk. God damn him. It was too late to go into the town for dinner by now and we ended the day in the hotel eatery just relieved to have a bed for the night and to be alone together after a frantic week of wedding preparations. The room we were given for this first night as husband and wife

was interesting. The furniture looked all pre-war, the first war, such a lumpy bed and so high. Then there was the gurgling water pipes running down the corner of the room, they seemed to sing all night long. Very romantic.

Next day we headed back to London in our Pop. In the weeks prior to the big day we had had to sort out a new place to live as the lease was coming to an end on the Weybridge place, the landlady wanting it back after her winter spent abroad. Boy was our new place different. Two upstairs rooms in a tiny old terrace house in the rougher part of New Malden with the minimum of furniture. It had been quite a tight run thing, getting a new place. We decided we couldn't afford to stay in Weybridge anymore, it being the home of the Beatles and other well-known celebs of the day, i.e. expensive. But finding somewhere between London and Weybridge to help our daily travel to work and within our set budget was not at all easy. Another new place to live, the fourth in less than 8 months. A pattern was being set.

*(3<sup>rd</sup> February 2013 – Penang)*

## Moving On

1969 was the year that man first walked on the moon with the landing of Apollo 11, The Beatles were in the middle of going their separate ways, Nixon became the 37<sup>th</sup> president of the USA, Jimmy Hendrix was making waves in London and Jenny and I got teaching jobs in Ghana, Africa.

That spring and summer I taught Jenny to drive in the Pop. A few weeks before her driving test she went for official driving lessons with a local instructor and with his help to fine tune her road sense, she passed the test first time. Now I had competition for the driving seat.

Ruth continued to visit us and stay some weekends, particularly if there was a film or event up in town she wanted to see. But every weekend would find me and Jenny sitting on the living room floor sifting through the Sunday Times jobs advertisement pages looking for that golden opportunity to make itself known to us. I did get an interview with Shell in the company's oil exploration division but after an orientation weekend at the company's refinery at the mouth to the river Thames, it became clear that it wasn't the job for me. I would be away from Jenny for up to six months at a time at some remote drilling location in the desert, or worse, in the North Sea. Not going to do that.

Our life in London and the suburbs was becoming a little too monotonous and work for both of us was becoming a bit of a drag. Jenny was not happy dealing with IBM's City banker type customers, all the glad handing was not her style, and she was disenchanted with the uniformity that IBM demanded of their employees. The company's male employees were required to wear the company blue tie and it became a bit a joke that they had taken IBM's shilling and sold their soles to the company. The expectation that trainees would work unpaid overtime wasn't appreciated either. My work at BAC was tedious in the extreme no matter how 'exciting' the Concorde project might appear on the surface, the daily reality of stressing the airplanes components was stressing me out too. Computers were still only to be found in universities or large companies that needed to manipulate large amounts of data, like banks and the public utilities boards for customer records etc. The only access to a computer at Weybridge was via a tape machine in a corner of the stress office where I could upload a programme to the electricity board mainframe somewhere in central London and then only to have the job run over night as a batch job, getting the results returned to me the next day. Not a very satisfactory way to work

As a rule, I always made sure I clocked in late. A pathetic way to protest I know, but I did resent immensely having to clock in. It got to the stage that I would phone in sick and bunk off work at least once a month, always on a Friday. Funny thing is that not once was my pay docked for the hours I didn't turn up for work and neither was I called in to the head man's office for a little chat about my errant ways.

Then one lazy Sunday afternoon, we spotted an advertisement posted by the Ghanaian Embassy for teachers of science and mathematics for the start of the new school year. Applications letters sent off, interview undertaken and before we knew it, it was a done deal. They had gotten two for the price of one, so to speak and we were scheduled to leave for Ghana at the beginning of September. Sharing the terraced house in New Malden with us in the ground floor flat was a young couple from Uganda. Their first reaction on the news that we were off to Ghana was of undisguised surprise. Were we sure we knew what we were letting ourselves in for? Well, no, but be nice to go and find out. How naive we were. They were sweet, offering advice on this and that. Before we left for Ghana, they treated us to dinner at theirs.



This new future enlivened us both, planning things to be done before the big day, arranging to see people before we left etc. We contacted the London School of Tropical Medicine and arranged for the necessary injections against an advised list of tropical diseases, collected packets of anti malarial pills of the right type etc. The anti yellow fever injection was the one with the biggest kick. We had the jab together with a couple of other injections late one morning and after lunch together I took the train back to New Malden and Jenny set off back to work. I hadn't been sitting on the train for long before I came over all peculiar like and slumped to one side on to the bench seat. The other passengers in the compartment eyed me with suspicion but not one of them asked me if I was OK or if I needed some help. Must have thought I was drunk or on drugs or some such thing. By the time the train had reached New Malden station I was recovered enough to haul myself up and stagger out on to the platform. I really didn't remember the walk home; my head was cotton wool.

Once home I collapsed on the bed, hoping that Jenny hadn't had the same terrifying reaction to the jab. Wrong. Not long after I put my head down the phone rang. A ticket collector at the tube station somewhere in central London was on the line to let me know that Jenny was sitting in waste paper bin outside his office window and she would appreciate it very much if I would come and collect her as she had no idea how to get home. I set off straight away to find the station and poor old Jenny, who was indeed slumped by a waste bin in a state of complete disorientation. Nobody at the clinic that morning had warned us about our possible reaction to the terror jab, only saying we might feel a little feverish in an hour or so. Right.

*(9<sup>th</sup> February – Penang)*

Pete and Mandy came to visit us in New Malden, a couple who were to play a big part in Jenny's and my future. They had already been staying in Ghana for a year and were then in the UK on summer leave from Adisadel College, the school I had been assigned to join in Ghana. They came to visit us in the hope that we could include some of their stuff in our baggage allowance. Like a fridge full of goodies. Well our baggage allowance wasn't going to cover what Mandy had in mind, but it was good to meet someone who knew the place we were about to spend the next two years. I can still see Mandy sitting in our dilapidated old sofa, almost as if she was being eaten by it, it was in such a collapsed state. Much later she told me she thought both Jenny and I were very naive about our new jobs. Totally unprepared, which was right, we were.

But we kept on preparing as best we could. For one pre-departure job, Jenny and Ruth had to take me in hand to get me to the dentist. The last time they took action like this was not long after Jenny moved to London. They decided to get me a decent set of clothes to wear, something more appropriate to the London of the swinging 60s than an old sports jacket and grey flannels. They took me down Carnaby Street shopping and kitted me out with a new light brown elephant cord jacket and trendy woollen trousers together with some new



shirts, kipper ties and a new pair of tooled leather brown shoes to complete the ensemble. Cost me a fortune but they would not be denied.

I have always had a problem going to the dentist since I had six teeth removed at one go when I was ten years old. I was just plain scared of the dentist. But I had to go now. Being in Ghana with dodgy teeth appealed less than a trip to a UK dentist. Jenny and Ruth both had to come with me to provide encouragement and support for the first visit. The dentist they chose was opposite Victoria Railway Station and he was an Australian. He had a very attractive dental nurse to assist him and he had all the latest gear to do the business on my teeth. He was the first dentist I ever trusted, and I made the next couple of follow up visits to his place on my own. How brave was I?

The departure date came around before we knew it. We handed in our notices at our respective places of work, cancelled our rent contract and did the last-minute preparations to leave the UK. To my astonishment, my boss in the stress office said he was sorry to see me go as he thought I would have had a bright future in BAC, this despite my lousy time keeping. Our last night in London was spent with Ruth and a friend of Jenny's from IBM. Jenny's friend managed to blag a mate's empty apartment in town for the night and after dinner together at Mossop Street one last time, the four of us crashed out there for the night. Next day Jenny and I made our way to Heathrow and boarded a VC 10 bound for Accra via Rome. This was only the second time I had flown, and it was the first time for Jenny. She had a love of flying from that day on.

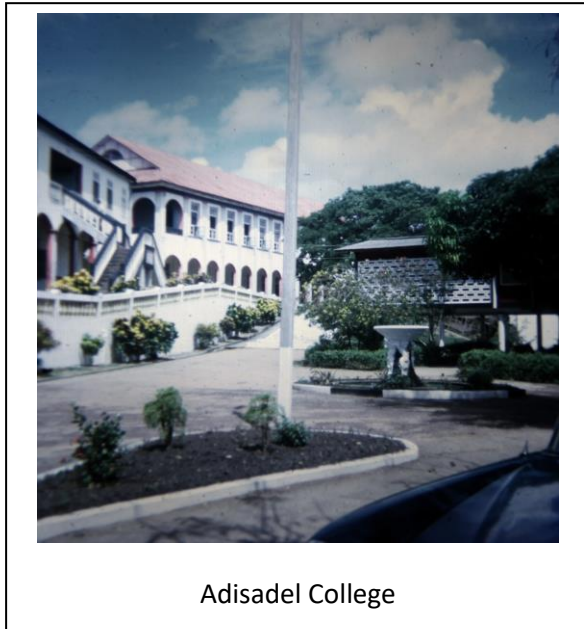
Following a delay at Rome airport, dusk saw us flying south over the Sahara Desert and spotting the flares from the oil drilling rigs dotted across the sands below. After the usual coffee at Accra airport about which we had been forewarned by Mandy, we emerged from immigration to find Pete and Mandy waiting for us with the school's transport, which was a huge relief to both me and Jenny. It was already dark by this time and the thought of trying to find a place to stay for the night in Accra was not just a little daunting. Our destination was Cape Coast about 80 miles to the west of Accra, a good two-hour drive away. It was late by the time we were delivered to our new home, a colonial style bungalow in the grounds of the college on a ridge overlooking the town. It had been a tiring but a very exciting day.

*(15<sup>th</sup> February 2013 – Penang)*

## **Cape Coast, Ghana**

Cape Coast was founded by the Portuguese in the 15th century, but after being in the hands of the Dutch then the Swedes, the town was finally captured by the British in 1646 and used as their base for the West African Gold Coast slave trade until well into the 1800s. It has a very grim history. Slaves were brought here from inland by their captors and sold or exchanged for manufactured goods to the British who then transported them to the

Caribbean to be sold on to the plantation owners to work in the sugar cane and tobacco fields. The slave ships would then load up with local agricultural products, molasses, rum, and the like before setting sail for England where the new ships cargoes were exchanged for manufactured goods to be shipped back to Cape Coast and used in barter to acquire more slaves to be shipped off to the Caribbean in a triangle of human misery. A terrible thing.



Adisadel College

Adisadel College was and still is an all boys' boarding school founded originally by the Right Reverend Dr Nathaniel Temple Hamlyn of the Anglican Church in 1910. His purpose was to provide a grammar school style education for sons of Anglican parents with a particular emphasis on training boys to be part of the Anglican Church. It is the second oldest secondary school in Ghana. The bungalow we were allocated was quite spacious with an ancient canon on the front patio, a smaller version of the ones in the Cape Castle photograph. How or why it came to be there I never found out. The bungalow also had a brilliant position on a hill which

afforded us some breeze to cool us down. And cool us down was what we needed. Cape coast is barely 80 miles from the equator and as a result is hot and what is worse, hot and very humid both day and night. This took some getting used to but after a couple of weeks we adapted to this new climate and we found ways to keep ourselves comfortable.

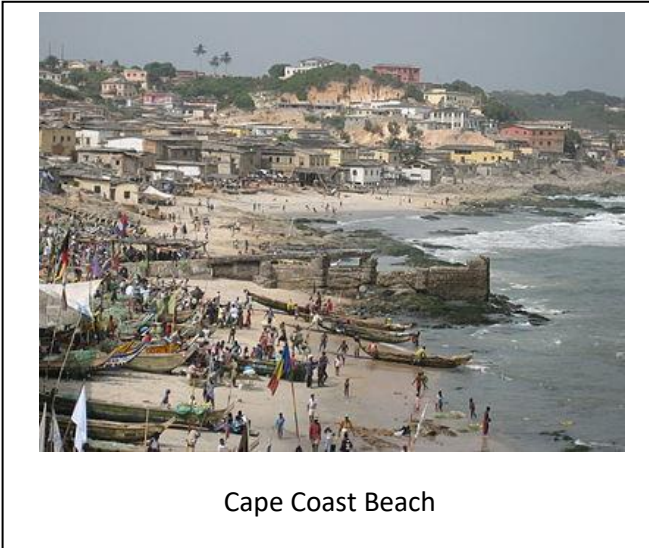
Mandy and Peter were great in helping us to settle into this totally new environment. With their help we soon acquired a cook/house cleaner to look after us. Since a domestic worker's pay was so low and there was an expectation that we would contribute to the local economy by employing at least one local person, we took on a guy from the local village. With a little coaching from Jenny, he was soon able to produce the simple meals we required. Mandy also pointed us in the right direction for shopping which may have seemed obvious, there being only one store in Cape Coast but there were also markets and farms around where you could get fresh veggies and some fruits. We also acquired a puppy, Ebenezer. He was a mongrel, black and white with a little bit of light brown and very adorable. He was supposed to be our guard dog, but he liked visitors too much, the only threat



Cape Coast Slave Castle.

to them was a lashing from his tongue or his tail!

Jenny had a teaching job at the Wesley Girls' High School about 2.5 miles from the Adisadel campus and not long after the term started, it became clear that we needed to have some kind of transport to get Jenny to and from her school. A car was far too expensive for us to



Cape Coast Beach

even contemplate and so we resolved to buy a motor bike, a very cheap motor bike. After asking around for where to get a bike, the word was out, and a guy turned up at our door with one for sale. After a very short driving lesson on the school football ground where I all but drove into one of the only two obstacles on the field, a goal post, I decided to buy it. Even though this was the first bike I had been offered. Really dumb. Of course, being Europeans, our ability to negotiate a

deal on any purchase of anything was always going to be in the other guy's favour. I have never been able to negotiate deals anyway. Even now I leave it to Gek to get a good price. I am totally hopeless at the game. As a result, we ended up with a bike that I had to rebuild, a real wreck of a machine. But never mind. I did enjoy the rebuild and the machine did serve us well until we left Ghana after its resurrection from the dead.

And so it was that we set ourselves up to live in Africa.

*22<sup>nd</sup> February – Penang*

The last member to join our new household was a little cat. I found her on our front courtyard on my return from class one day. She was very small, perhaps 4 to 5 weeks old and very, very weak. She couldn't even stand on her own. We took her in and put her on a chair with her head on the edge of the seat and fed her milk from a dropper I nicked from a



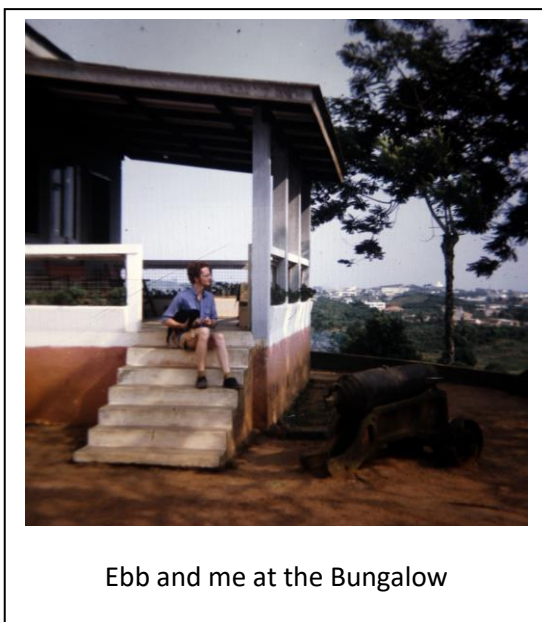
Cape Coast Town

school lab. It took a few days, but she made a full recovery and became my constant companion, following me to class every day. I often had to shoo her back to the bungalow otherwise she would have joined the boys in the classroom for a maths or physics lesson

I must confess to loving our set up in Ghana right from the off. Somehow life seemed more real there than in the UK

where our time was so structured around a 9 to 5 day and a 5-day week. Ghanaians have a much more free and easy approach to living, very much the same as here in Malaysia. Mind you it did help to have only a 2 min walk to the classroom and classes that started at 7 am and finished by 1 pm leaving the afternoons free to do your own thing. A good life. If it hadn't been for Jenny having completely opposite reaction to her new environment than mine, I have often thought I would probably still be in Ghana. Jenny didn't like the place one little bit and it wasn't long after we arrived that she was plotting to leave. Jenny at that time was a real townie. I remember in our courting days she couldn't understand my love of the countryside and open spaces, always wanting to return to an urban environment, structured and ordered. I guess the root of her unhappiness in Cape Coast was the lack of order and predictability which I totally embraced but she couldn't cope with, mega culture shock, you might say.

But after a while we settled into a routine of sorts, driven by the school terms and school hours. When I arrived, the school was teaching to the British GCE system up to A Level, which was fortunate, since I had brought all my A Level note books to teach from. To say I was underprepared for the job in hand is a gross understatement. Just because you have a degree with a mathematics basis doesn't mean you can teach the subject or anything else



Ebb and me at the Bungalow

come to that. Boy was I naïve. My classes were maths with the 'O' level year and physics first year 'A' level. The maths was more of a challenge than the physics, or so I thought, as I had to teach calculus which required a little more thought in preparing the lessons than the physics. How to enthuse a room full of thirteen-year-old lads with the beauty of calculus anywhere on the planet is not easy but especially so on the west coast of Africa. A bit of a challenge but one I really enjoyed although I didn't realize it at that time this was going to be the kind of challenge I would relish much later in my working life.

*(23<sup>rd</sup> February – Penang)*

Once the motor bike was rebuilt, Jenny and I could take off and explore the local area much more, not to mention to do our own shopping in Cape Coast town without having to go with Peter and Mandy every time. Elmina was a favourite place to visit. The road to the seaside town ran parallel to the beach and was lined with coconut palms all the way from Cape Coast, some 8 miles or so, a real picture post card long beach with waving palms and breaking surf all to ourselves. There was a lovely cafe-bar on the beach by Elmina, an ideal place to while away an afternoon in the cooling sea breeze. We would take Ebb with us on



the motor bike, lying on Jenny's lap with his head sticking out underneath my arm watching the road ahead. It was amazing that he understood not to jump off once the bike was moving and after the first ride he used to know exactly what was expected of him, waiting till Jenny and I were astride the bike before making a leap for his centre seat. None of us had crash helmets, of course. I don't remember seeing any motorcyclists wearing them in Cape Coast. All a bit hairy really, given the state of the roads and the not so disciplined Ghanaian drivers but lady luck was on our side and during our time in Cape Coast we didn't have any accidents or near misses that I can remember although there must have been one or two.

Peter and Mandy became our great friends. Could it have been that all four of us were from the Manchester area, a grouping together with members of the same tribe in an unfamiliar place? Could have been. We went drinking together in the local bars, played bridge together in the evenings at their house, even organised a big party together at their place, inviting all the people we knew for the big bash. Mandy decided that we would have a pig roasted in the garden for which we dug a pit. I was sent off up country to an agricultural school to find a suitable pig to roast. I got there OK but on the way home I had a puncture on the back tyre of the bike. The road wasn't metalled, it being what they call a laterite road, i.e. compressed dirt, and so the chances of getting a hole in your tyre was high. What to do? Stuck at the side of the road in the middle of nowhere and no other wheeled traffic to cadge a lift from? Just as I was about to give up hope and set off on foot to find help, a Land Rover hove into view with a load of students aboard from the college I had just visited. They were on their way to Cape Coast for a night on the town. They heaved the bike into the back of the Land Rover and held it between them, insisting that I sit up front with the driver. Sorted. What a relief. They all thought it was highly amusing. Not many Europeans got stuck out in the bush with a broken-down motor bike, apparently

*11<sup>th</sup> March 2013 – Penang*

## **African Stories**

My memories of our time in Ghana are in the form of short cameos and it is difficult for me to thread them together. Perhaps because it was 43 years ago but then again, the older memories of school and university days seem much more joined up.

One memory is of the horrific sunburn I got surfing in the early days. Being ginger headed and very fair skinned, I shouldn't have been so stupid. We went to the beach with Peter and Mandy to enjoy an afternoon playing in the waves with a surfboard, a very short surfboard. I didn't really notice the sun on my shoulders at the time because of the cooling effect of the water but on the way back home they began to really hurt. By the next morning my shoulders were erupting into large yellow blisters of a second-third degree burn. So off to the hospital to see if they could help, which of course they couldn't, with burns you just have to let your body do the repair work. I can still see the look on the nurse's face when I

took off my shirt. Sort of, ahhh that looks painful! The skin did regenerate but even today you can still see the results of that scorching, very hairy shoulders, I have.

Other memories are of people arriving in Ghana from Europe even less prepared than Jenny and I had been. On one of our visits to the beach bar in Elmina, we met a young English girl who was hiking along the coast to Morocco. She had left the UK to take a holiday in Italy where she had met up with some travellers who were heading across the Sahara towards Nigeria. They apparently invited her to join them and on a whim she said yes. No preparation, no anti this that or other jabs for all the nasty diseases which lurk in that part of the world, she didn't even have anti malarial pills. "What are they?", she asked. Once across the desert she left the group and set off heading south down through Nigeria on her own with the intention of returning to UK via the West African coast all the way up to Morocco and then across the Straits to Gibraltar. Of course, all four of us thought she was completely nuts. When we met her, she had been in West Africa for only a couple of weeks and we tried to persuade her that here was a good place to return home from. But she just smiled at us sweetly and said to us not to worry, she would be OK. Never found out if she made it home or not.

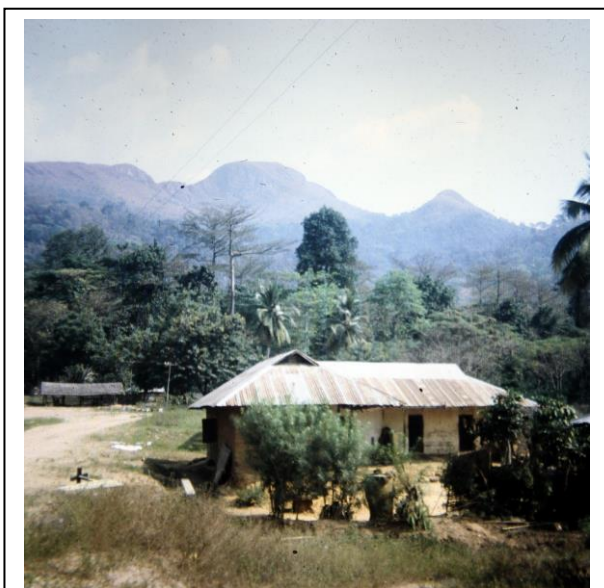
The other innocent abroad was a young lad who came on an exchange to Adisadel College from a public school in the UK. I say lad because he was in his late teens, doing his 'A' levels. He had arrived at Accra airport and hired a taxi to bring himself to the college. Lords knows why nobody was there at the airport to meet him. Luckily for him the taxi driver looked after him but, unfortunately, in doing so made the young lad very, very ill. The taxi driver treated him to a roadside meal on the way to Cape Coast. Not a good idea. The next day he was in Cape Coast Hospital with chronic diarrhoea, in truth it nearly killed him. We visited him a couple of times to see him sitting in a bath, he just was couldn't stop shitting. He was in a really bad way. After over a week in the hospital he was well enough to return to his college rooms but was still very weak. It was only then that we realised how naive he really was, being completely unable to look after himself. For the length of his stay he would not touch the local food in the student canteen, not surprising given the ordeal he had just been through, but being unable to cook for himself, he ended up having his meals at either our place or Pete and Mandy's. He would turn up at our door in the evening just as we were about to sit down to dinner, looking hungry.

At the end of Easter school term, my inexperience as a teacher finally caught up with me. The A level physics class wrote a damning four-page critique of my teaching methods, or rather, the lack of the same and gave it to the headmaster, Mr. Povey. He called me to his office on the last day of term and confronted me with the script. I have to say I had to agree with all the points the students made. Shame it was a retrospective view. Povey seemed a bit taken aback when I did not contest anything the students had written about me. My response was rather, ".....so what do we do now?" It is a huge responsibility teaching. You can really mess up someone's life if you as a teacher cannot engage with the learner.



Memories of Mr. Scott at Darwen Grammar School come to mind. Clearly nothing I could do would correct this cock up, the damage had already been done and so it was decided that, since the O level students seemed to enjoy my approach with them, I would keep that class but drop the physics and teach biology next term. Why biology I cannot remember, there must have been a teacher short for that subject. So out of the frying pan into the fire so to speak, for me at least. The last biology I did myself was at O level! Poor Adatungie, the other physics teacher in the school and by now a friend of mine, had to take on teaching my ex-physics class. Mr. Povey also intimated that he would try and find me another school to go to at the end of the summer term. But who would want to take me on after being asked to leave Adisadel College. So, sacked for incompetence, was I.

The next day Jenny, Mandy, Peter and I set off for a pre-planned road trip to visit the Mount Afadjato hill station, the Volta Dam and then on into Accra. This diversion must have helped to take my mind off the sacking but in truth I wasn't that bothered by it. Once you put your hands up and admit to yourself that you have screwed up, what's to stress about? Learn and move on. This was Jenny and mine's second trip out of Cape Coast. The first was to Kumasi about 150 miles north of Cape Coast with Janet Boucher, a fellow teacher, and was memorable for seeing the newly released film "The Odd Couple" with Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau in the lead roles. Sitting in an open-air cinema in West Africa watching a film set in a New York apartment was very surreal.



Mount Afadiato.

At the time of this second trip out of Cape Coast, Peter was still recovering from a recurring bout of hepatitis, and so it was decided that I would do the driving. No problemo. Be great to be back on four wheels after the bike. The Mount Afadjato hill station bungalow was used by the British administrators in colonial times as a retreat from the heat and humidity of the coast. The bungalow was built on a ridge close to the mountain's top and at nearly 3000 feet, it was cool enough in the evenings for us to need the warmth of a log fire when the outside temperature dropped quite markedly. There was a stupendous view from the path running

along the edge of the ridge, almost like walking on the edge of a knife blade, the land falling away as it did so very steeply on either side of the path.

None of us wanted to leave this place, it was so relaxing to be away from everything and just chill out. But leave we had to and move on to the Volta Lake. The building of the

Akosombo Dam, a hydroelectric dam on the Volta River, formed the Volta Lake, which is the world's largest man-made lake, covering 3,283 sq miles, taking up 3.6% of Ghana's land area. The primary purpose of the Akosombo Dam was to provide electricity for the Ghanaian aluminium industry.

Somewhere along the way, Mandy had eaten something that caused her to have a very bad tummy upset. All of us were regularly getting upset tummies, but this was severe enough for us to seek out a hospital to get some medical advice. The only one we could find was in an army base, but they were very good to us and gave Mandy some pills to help her condition. It did mean, however, that we were holdup unexpectedly for a couple of days in a local hotel before Mandy was well enough to travel again. As a result, to play catch up it meant we had to do a bit of night driving. Not a good idea on roads that are used by logging lorries. The lorry drivers had a habit of leaving unattended, unlit trailers loaded with logs parked in total darkness at the side of the roads. As a result, you could be happily driving along when all of a sudden, the ends of huge logs fill your windscreen. If the trailer didn't get you, the ditch would as you swerved to avoid the trailer. A sort of lose-lose situation.

But we made it in one piece to Accra and had an enjoyable couple of days in the city before heading home to Cape Coast. Peter and Mandy took us to their favourite Lebanese restaurant where I was first introduced to humus. The whole experience of eating in a restaurant and not a local bar was quite novel, and much enjoyed by us all. A real treat.

*15<sup>th</sup> March 2013 – Penang*

## Going Home

Before we left the UK for Ghana, we already knew that Jenny's mum, Annie, was becoming ill but at that time, no diagnosis had been made. After our return from the Volta Dam road trip we got the unwanted news that Annie had Parkinson's disease, and that her condition was deteriorating quite rapidly. This news, of course, really upset Jenny and made it for certain that she would be returning to the UK during the school's summer vacation if not sooner. Sooner is what she wanted. She didn't want to wait till the end of school term.

I did suggest to Jenny that she went home immediately on her own to be with her Mum and I would follow as soon as I could at the end of the school year, but she said she wouldn't leave if I wasn't going with her. So that was that, we were in planning mode to go back to the UK. In the event, Annie died less than twelve months later, retrospectively making the decision Jenny took to return home sooner rather than later the right one. It was just the way we left Ghana that was not right.

Jenny had been saving every penny we could afford for our air tickets home that school summer holidays, almost from the very first day we arrived in Cape Coast, meaning we had the cash for my air ticket in the bank. Jenny's ticket would be paid for by the Ghanaian Ministry of Education on compassionate grounds. All the planning was done in great

secrecy, not even Pete and Mandy knew we were about to do a moonlight flit, as it were. They knew Jenny was going back to the UK on compassionate leave granted by her school and agreed by the ministry but not that I was going with her and it would be a one-way trip for both of us.

I was not at all happy that I was leaving the school in the lurch like this, halfway through a term and that we were breaking our contracts. My colleagues and now friends would have to pick up my timetable, meaning an extra teaching burden for them, not to mention the detrimental effect my sudden departure would have on the students' education. I also loved the feel of Ghana and the laid back, accepting people that are the Ghanaians and really didn't want to leave at all. But my sacking from Adisadel a few weeks earlier, Jenny's manifest hatred of the place and our life there, and now news of her Mum's deteriorating health, combined to form an overwhelming need to go back to the UK as soon as possible.

## Memory Litter Bin.

### London

1. **Anti Vietnam demo in London 1968** – Soon after Jenny had moved to London, a major anti-war rally was held in city. Jenny and I went along to show our support as witnesses to the event but ended up as participants. As we were standing at the roadside watching the various gangs of chanting protesters representing different organisations and groups, who should come along but a gang from the University of Birmingham, banner held aloft. We just had to join them, didn't we.?

As we progressed down Westminster, there was a repeated ritual of holding back from the gang in front of us there by creating a space for us all to charge forward into chanting 'Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Min'. I started by joining the chant but stopped at half chant, realising that this action was not expressing anti war sentiments but pro Vietcong sentiments, that is, supporting one side if not the one that was seen as our own. One man shooting at another man is wrong, no matter what the rights and wrongs of either's case. The communist North Vietnamese were, after all, attempting through war to impose their own brand of government on the South Vietnamese under the disguise of liberation. Communist governments are anything but 'liberal'.

There was a kerfuffle at the American Embassy that day which we didn't hear about until we saw the evening news on the television. We did wonder why we had been corralled in the road along side Regents Park for over an hour. No mobile phones or iPads back then in 1968 and so no rallying call from the organiser to hot foot it over to Grovner Square. It is perhaps just as well we were ignorant of the 'Grovner Square Incident'.



## Ghana

1. **Teaching English** – During our time in Cape Coast Jenny and I employed a succession of three different stewards to look after our bungalow and do our cooking, all male. The second chap we employed, regrettably I have forgotten his name completely, was much younger than the other two. He came to us from the local village at the bottom of the hill on which our bungalow was built. He was a bright young man and he asked me if I would mind helping him out by giving him some English lessons which I did in the afternoons after class. Unfortunately, he didn't stay with us very long as he started to show signs of TB soon after joining us. Although Jenny and I had had anti TB booster injections before we left the UK, it really was a no brainer that we could continue to have him preparing our food etc. I took him to the hospital on the motor bike where, after doing the appropriate tests, they confirmed the diagnosis as TB. I don't know what happened to him, but with no access to medical treatment for his condition, his prospects were pretty bleak. Very sad.
2. **Rebuilding Janet's cars engine** – Janet was a colleague on the Teaching staff in Adisadel College. She had bought a Morris 1000, the type of car I had learned to drive in a few years earlier. The head gasket had blown and rather than entrust her precious car to the local garage, she opted for Peter and me to do the repair.
3. **The guy who visited us from Nigeria with art pieces** – Every now and then, a guy from Northern Nigeria would turn up unannounced at our bungalow door with ethnic artefacts for sale. He was a very personable chap and we invariably found something to our liking to buy from him. He would enter our living room and lay out his goodies on a richly decorated woven blanket and Jenny would choose an item she liked, over which both of them would barter a price. I have never been into this bartering business, always preferring to pay the asking price or not based on my view of the article's worth. I still have the two ebony heads and mask that Jenny no doubt got for us at a very reasonable cost.