

International Travel and Adventures in the 1970's

I found myself on the 12th floor of the Edward Street Tower telling a man why I should be accepted into a top job. After receiving this position and a short settling-in period, all involved wanted to know about ME. This was difficult as I always gave and was interested in others – but off I went.

I was in south Africa during apartheid and the Soviet Union during the Cold War in the mid-70s.....
All were astounded and wanted more.

My girlfriend and I, both country girls with a love of adventure, set off for the U.K. and Europe. Our enjoyable travels through Scandinavia opened our eyes to the beautiful people, cities and spectacular scenery. Further north into Finland, and the demeanour of the people begins to change. They have not just endured extremes in weather but they are a people close to the Baltic Sea. Passing through Finland, we part the Iron Curtain and head into Russia – the Soviet Union, where all people are equals,

Leningrad, Kalinski, Moscow, Smolensk and Minsk. After the way of life in Scandinavia, heading into Russia was like stepping through a mirror to the other world. The intensity commenced at the Border with such rigid and invasive checks that one girl on tour started having panic attacks. Apart from passports, visas and the usual relentless eye-to-eye contact, all our luggage was searched for any indication of trading on the Black Market. They particularly liked checking underwear and jeans as these clothing items had never been seen in the Soviet Union. So we made it through all these men who loved power, and the landscape was dismal, kilometres of identical housing estates, no parks, and vehicles of Soviet origin from the '40s and '50s. People walking everywhere.

Prior to reaching our campsite in Leningrad, our courier and driver disappeared for a few hours to make a deal on the Black Market to allow us some extra privileges like champagne, caviar and Russian icecream.

They traded American dollars and we were informed that the children loved chewing gum and pens, so that was our trade for the Soviet Union badges of Lenin or the Hammer & Sickle. These are received by children at school for loyalty to Lenin the U.S.S.R.

Our campsite was guarded and locked by the Military but we drank schnapps and slept well. My parents may have been concerned as Dad was in local government and was able to obtain Diplomatic Immunity certification for me least I got into trouble. You certainly did not show dislike for any aspect of politics while there, and took no photos of government installations, bridges, roads or nuclear plants.

The cities are magnificent and described and photographed by many over the years. The Underground in Moscow has chandeliers and not a speck of rubbish. There are some outstanding Hotels as seen in movies, and the Heritage Museum is of gigantic proportions.

We attended the Russian Ballet. There was some brilliance but behind this, one notes the shabby outdated costumes, heavy awful makeup and hair, and worn shoes. Malcolm and Tammy Fraser were there and caught a glimpse of young Aussies during the Show; they remained and chatted to us afterwards.

The people all remain in a constant state of sadness as etched on the faces of women, old before their time, grief remains a constant as husbands and sons were killed during conflicts. Such descriptive narratives in Paullina Simons *The Bronze Horseman* of love and loss and fading hope for the future. Even *Dr. Zhivago* by Boris Pasternak, a physician and poet, can't escape the heartache of the 1905 Revolution. Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* reflects the political times for women and tragedy, but I have not, and probably will not, commence *War & Peace*.

Whilst browsing the shops (i.e. supermarkets) in the early '70s, it is obvious there was absolutely no trade with the West. Not a single branded item and shoppers lined up outside from early morning till late at night. Everyone looked at you with suspicion, and Red Square was one huge line to view Lenin in the Mausoleum. Our bus was comfortable and the only problem was the girl who had to go to hospital for a night with asthma. We did have fun.

After 5 weeks touring, we decided on a vehicle to travel through the United Kingdom. We had a friend who was an historical intellect so off to the castles, monuments, statues and rolling green fields. We had a photo of us at Lands' End and then John O'Groats. Lots of Shakespeare and Jane Austin moments. The ability to remain away from congested areas and really take-in the far-away countryside as in Thomas Hardy's *Far From The Madding Crowd*, was our holiday. London remains amazing at every turn.

We met some South African men who had finished their compulsory military training and were touring ahead of us. We left our tour and hitched a ride to Barcelona from Southern France to catch up. On returning to London base, we decided on a homebound trip via South Africa.

The hospitality and generosity shown to us was akin to being at home. Much of the vegetation was gum trees and jacarandas lining the clear blue sky. We took a cruise ship from Dublin to Cape Town, calling in at Port Elizabeth. We met and stayed with a wonderful Doctor and enjoyed the sights of the city and Table Mountain. We took a train to a Black area to experience the town, people and housing. I went crayfishing down near Cape Horn. Took the train back to J'burg to experience the vastness of Wilbur Smith's home and dreamings.

To have servants whilst in a rotunda in the middle of a game park, meet the King of Zululand, and stop on the roadside for excellent crocheted articles and gold jewellery, was so authentic for the time. We went to a horse race meeting and have photos of a huge yard for Blacks only. This is the way it was, and it did disturb us even then. The home we stayed at had hard-working white South Africans; they had a cook, gardener and chauffer, who loved their life and the family they worked for.

I went solo by small plane to Rhodesia, landed on Salisbury Airstrip with elephants, wobbly on noogoora berries, over and around the strip and on the sides of the roads into town. I stayed in a grand English Hotel, partied with the locals, and flew to Victoria falls. Again, African animals were sighted along with a large chain of hippopotamus in Lake Kariba, coming up for air, mouths open, such a sight. Stayed at Lake Kariba and watched the weaver birds nesting high in the flame trees, solving the problems of the world, not unlike Alexander McCall Smith's *Precious Ramotswe Mysteries*.

Two weeks prior to my solo trip to Victoria Falls, I was informed two English girls were shot dead standing at the railway crossing to Zambia near the Zambezi River. I didn't venture that area but relished the Falls.

On a second long European trip I had extra time to fill in while waiting for my sister's wedding in Wales. I took a private nursing position and during the interview with the Honourable Jenny MacDonald Esq. I was asked to wear appropriate evening wear to dinner. Quick thinking as we had been camping for 6 months! I mentioned I would prefer to maintain my professionalism and wear a simple uniform. That sorted, we headed off to Gullet Farm Devon in the ambulance. I had to go and buy her alcohol and she commenced drinking on the journey. I cared and catered for her day and night. Such a big annual event was being planned – 'The Shoot'. Many guests were made welcome and among them the young courting Prince Charles and Diana Spencer. The huge Aga cooked whole venison, the gardener filled the house with flowers, and my patient behaved.

I spent Christmas there and actually felt quite lonely, but they made me part of the family. I kept in contact with Jenny until she passed away; she did dearly want to visit Australia.

Gullet Farm had a huge lower shelved room filled with Emergency Supplies by the hundreds in case of a nuclear event. These were times of great concern and he was Mr. Esso, so undoubtedly had more information than most.

I really need to cruise down the Nile, see the pyramids, and stay in the Port of Aden.....

Cheerio for now.

Bev