

# TRAVEL REPORTS - AFRICA

## Zambia - August and September 2004

I was born in Livingstone, Zambia, some 36 years ago. I was 11-months old when my parents and sister came back to Belgium. And we never came back to Zambia. It always has been mysterious to me to be born so far away from Belgium and not to know this African country. That is why I decided early 2004 to go there and meet Zambia and Livingstone...

The hosts who answered me were Clare and Vimbi Mateke, living in Livingstone. I saw on the list that Clare was working as the Keeper of Mammals at the Museum and as my father had been the Keeper of Ethnography at the same place, I thought it would be nice to meet with her. I didn't have any pictures with me, just a photocopy of my birth certificate. And street names had changed a few years ago ...

When we arrived in Livingstone with my friend Valérie, Vimbi came to collect us and while talking in the car, he said to me: "You know, if your father was working at the Museum, he should have been living in a Museum's house. And there is only one in the street, the one we're living in ... " Well, after having had a look on my birth certificate: street name (before it changed), house number, situation (in front of Hillcrest School) were matching!!! Could I believe it??? The year I choose to meet Zambia, I have the opportunity to stay in the house which saw my first months of living!

On top of this unbelievable surprise, Clare and Vimbi Mateke and their 3 children are people of a special kind: so welcoming, open-heart, curious about other cultures, kind, funny... and so human. Clare made some research to see if there were some writings left from my father, she introduced me to the actual Keeper of Ethnography who himself took the time to show me some collection pieces brought by my father to the Museum, she introduced me to one of the carpenter who had worked with my father, ...

We also had the chance to meet with 2 classes of students who had a lot of questions on HIV, marriage, drink, smoking and Europe way of living. It was surprising to see the respect the students have for Vimbi.

This is Zambia, accumulating so many frustrations i.e: lack of money to make research, to publish books, to have more materials at school for the computer class, kitchen and technical class. Zambia is a big country and expensive for Africa. Two months are not enough to see all of it. It is a wonderful country, with human people, very smiling, open, with a wonderful and big diversity of wildlife. I never felt insecure; I was really feeling like at home.

If you love Africa, just go there and meet Clare, Vimbi, Alina, Temba and Siphon. No mystery's left for me about this Zambian part of me and I feel so happy.

Thank you to the wonderful organisation of Servas, and thank you to Clare and Vimbi.

*Nathalie Vrydagh - born in Zambia- living in Belgium*

You can read the complete text on [www.servas.org/belgium](http://www.servas.org/belgium)

## South Africa

*(Notes taken from a travel report)*

- Warm, welcoming and friendly people who went out of their way to make our stay enjoyable. They said they had contacts and the owner of a backpackers lodge was there to inform us. We booked to stay with him(not Servas). On the Saturday they took us to Reebeek Kasteel Olive Festival. We enjoyed tasting olives, wine and jam at all the farms and estates. A sentimental journey for me as my daughter was married there 6 years ago. They let us choose a semi-precious stone and select a jar of jam from their many preserves. We rang her daughter and arranged for us to stay with her as a new Servas host.
- We were their first Servas guests and they went to a lot of trouble doing us a braai. They have 2 delightful little boys, 6 & 4. One spontaneously gave us pictures he had drawn. We took advantage of their position as a police inspector to report a minor mishap in our hire vehicle down at the police station. They showed us the old town and it was a lovely day.
- Was not going to ask A as many demands are made on Servas hosts but she asked 'When are you coming?' It is the 4th time and it is always great fun. He had videoed the televised performance of the Freedom Day showing of the Opera Fidelio done in Robben Island. It was very moving and a privilege to see it. We had our customary meal at the restaurant in the square overlooking the old harbour.
- Again I was not going to stay with G but I bumped into her at a Quaker Meeting and she said 'I hope you will be able to come and stay this time.' So I agreed. She is ideally situated for Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens. We had the choice of doing potting with her but we elected to go on a township tour. Very moving and interesting especially the Plutonic project - a multinational feeding programme for malnourished infants in a nursery whilst their mums make mats, hammocks etc with weaving. Now some are doing posters as well.

*Eileen Williams, Littlehampton, England*

## .. a solo backpacking Adventure

*(This is the concluding paragraph to a long article. The author did spend a number of days with Servas hosts as part of her trip. This article should be found on the website)*

In my memories there are thousands of Africans, often simple and poor in the economical sense. Though how rich and dignified they were in their humanity, how much they gave me. And these are the Africans I will remember. 397 days lived in Africa, full of extraordinary experiences and observations, registered on photographs and paper, are a wonderful part of my life, my 'gipsy' adventure. I believe that some day I will return to Africa, to the people who became so close to me, to the continent that fascinates me even more now.

*Basia Meder, Canberra, Australia*