

## 1977: Arrival in Zambia

“Madame, Madame, we are arriving in Lusaka,” a flight assistant notified me quietly.

“Thank you,” I sat up and stretched, slowly coming out of a deep sleep. Even with my few carry-ons, I walked, still groggy, to the exit door and down the stairs from the airplane.

It looked to be midafternoon. The sun reflected off mirrors on military vehicles lined up facing each other and delineating a pathway into a corrugated tin building. In front of and between each vehicle soldiers stood in parade-starched uniforms with rifles held diagonally across their chests.



from [www.google.com/africacontinent](http://www.google.com/africacontinent)

Having never seen such a military display when I stepped out of an airplane anywhere else in the world, my mind darted to *Oh my! Have I walked into a military coup?* Noticeably rattled, I followed the man in front of me and began digging for my passport, tickets, hosts' names and telephone number.

"**NEXT!**" a deep voice commanded and the line responded with multiple shuffles. At last I located the very tall man, maybe the tallest man I'd ever seen, who was shouting orders. Too soon, it was my turn. The officer sorted through my papers and did it again. He sighed loudly.

"Madame, where is your visitor's visa? Do you have one or not?"

"What I have . . . well, what I was given is here. Isn't it enough?" I heard a mousy little voice reply, not recognizing it as my own.

"I'm afraid not. Stand over there in front of that desk. I'll get back to you when I can."

Now, I **was** rattled. *I had double checked everything, I thought, in New York City before leaving on this trip. I'm sure . . .* Suddenly, I became aware the line I stood in disappeared into another room. I heard bags being dragged across concrete and strange, loud scrapes and bangs, perhaps heavy metal doors being pushed through gravel and then metal slamming against metal. *Were those doors closing?*

"Let's see about that visitor's visa." The security officer wrote on a slip of paper efficiently and asked me to sign my name in a ledger. Then he stamped PAID on the visa after I handed him a US ten-dollar bill.

My thank you came out muffled. I cannot explain my reactions, but tears rolled down my cheeks as I looked up into his dark face.

"It's okay, Madame, many people come here without proper papers. I have taken care of you." He encouraged me to get my bags as my plane was the last one of the day and the airport would be shutting down shortly.

Once into the second room, I scanned it for public telephones and my hosts Ted and Sharry Farrar. With no Farrars in the dwindling crowd, I called the phone number I had written down for their offices. No answer there either. *What to do, what to do?*

More metal doors were banging closed in other parts of the airport. I dragged two bags to another security guard and asked about a taxi. He informed me all had gone for the day. BANG again, this time closer as another metal door shut and locked. *I must get out of here!*

It was then I saw a man on the other side of the remaining luggage looking straight at me. Yes, I checked behind me. He was looking at me. He smiled and walked toward me.

"I'm sure I had a similar expression on my face the day I arrived for college in Cincinnati. Hello, I'm Oscar. How may I help you?"

"Well, my hosts have not arrived to meet me. I called them but there was no answer. The last taxis have headed for the city."

This Oscar fellow turned and scanned the room. "Yes, most of the people arriving on your flight have gone. How about I drive you into town? You look like you could use a cup of tea. How does that sound?"

"To be honest, alarming but, practically very helpful. If nothing else, I can check into a hotel for tonight and locate Ted and Sharry tomorrow."

The ride toward Lusaka allowed us to introduce ourselves more fully. Specifically, the ride gave me time to decide Oscar was no serial killer with plans for my slow, bloody death. Nor was he a hostage-taker intent on asking for a ransom.

I thought: *He'd picked the wrong victim, if money were his goal.*

Instead, Oscar explained he had brought a friend to the airport to catch a flight to Kenya. Seeing the bewildered look on my face must have reminded him of his own experience of arriving in a strange place called Ohio. He was a young man who had earned a scholarship to an engineering college in Cincinnati. He insisted that he would have never been able to graduate without all the help he had received from many friendly Americans during his four years at college. After graduation he returned home to become a water engineer in one of the northern provinces of Zambia. He had driven down to Lusaka today to participate in a week-long water conference sponsored by the government.

Over tea in a lovely hotel, I finished a turn at telling my story of what brought me to Zambia. "I'm a staff member of the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA). I live not far from where you went to school in Ohio, in the large city of Chicago, Illinois. The ICA is a private, non-profit group similar to the USA's Peace Corp that works in community development in villages and communities around the world. I'm here to facilitate leadership forums for women."

He seemed fascinated with the women's forums mainly because a great deal of work was being done to support and train women leaders by President Kaunda's government.

And finally, we got down to my dilemma, finding Ted and Sharry Farrar. Three more calls to the same telephone number had produced nothing. The front desk clerk in the hotel, where we were having tea, had no available rooms but checked with several competitors and found that all the city's guestrooms were booked for conference week.

After considerable silence, Oscar asked me to tell him about these two individuals I wanted to find. I shared what I knew, and one thing made his eyes dance: Sharry teaches at the International School in Lusaka. He had a friend working there, too. With a sudden burst of energy, he called his friend to see if she knew Sharry Farrar and where Sharry lived. She did! Matter of fact, the friend had just been to a holiday party at the Farrar's home.

Oscar and I drove up to the address at twilight. We located the buzzer on the outer wall of the compound surrounded by high walls with jagged glass sticking up toward the sky. I looked around and discovered that every home on the street was built similarly, jagged glass and all. A friendly Zambian staff person invited us in and directed us to a living room. The Farrars were out and expected to return later in the evening. We had interrupted some work he was doing so he excused himself politely and disappeared.

"Thank you, Oscar, you have been generous with your time in getting me where I needed to be and I have enjoyed problem-solving with you. Meeting a new Zambian friend has been great! You have really been fantastic!"

"Stop that. You're not getting rid of me yet. I've got to meet this Ted and Sharry. We'll wait for them together."

I noticed a large map of Zambia hanging on a wall. “Okay, how about telling me what I need to know about your country?”

What followed was a royal tutoring session from Oscar; it lasted for well over an hour—long enough for me to acquire a short, working knowledge of Zambia’s geography, history and peoples. He expanded my knowledge of the work of David Livingston and Livingston’s books that fascinated Europeans and Americans, as well as drew them to Zambia. Some travelers only visited Victoria Falls; others stayed for generations. Zambia had significant numbers of European managers and engineers during the early years of transition from colonialism. Few Zambians were trained to administer the mining industries or the government as the new nation began developing.

Oscar even spent time describing what an average workweek was like for a provincial water engineer. And, I became impressed by the importance of his work to this landlocked country and by the depth of his passion for the work.

When Ted and Sharry arrived, they were surprised to see me, thinking I was coming the next week. However, we all were glad to have extra days of preparation for the scheduled forum activities. Oscar encouraged Sharry and me to set an appointment with the new Secretary of Women’s Work in Zambia. Her offices were in Lusaka. He insisted that all three of us (the Secretary, Sharry and I) would benefit from such a visit.

I dug through the materials bag for a Global Women’s Forum program. The program cover was a colorful montage of women of all ages and from all parts of the world. He seemed to appreciate it as an art form. Oscar and the Farrars enjoyed a lively exchange about common acquaintances, and they exchanged business cards and invitations for future visits.



“Women of the World” by La Verne Phillips became the Global Women’s Forum program cover in 1971 at the first forum held in Hong Kong and later with other Global Women’s Forums held throughout the world.

“Let me know how everything goes,” Oscar called out while he slipped into his car, as if he and I would see each other again soon.

Smiling to myself later that evening, I wrote a few things down in my journal.

*I recalled the wild emotional roller coaster I had experienced: groggy awareness, alarm, confusion, fear, wariness, surprise, gratitude, wonder and joy—all in less than 24 hours! I promised myself I will never forget the loud, jarring sounds of slamming metal doors, like a percussions band, beating out a message: “MOVE ON!” I really appreciated the strengthening aroma of steaming Earl Grey tea and Oscar Lunga’s resourcefulness as we searched for the Farrars. Only hours ago, I was stranded in a strange land, disoriented, alone and pitifully shaken. Then a stranger popped up--an unexpected gift - and began opening doors.*