

Chapter 15 – UDI

John soon settled into his new school and life at Judge Hugh Barclay's residence. At home, he was the centre of attention and spoilt by all the adults, including Judge Barclay, the boss. At school, he was popular with his classmates, but his best friend was Richard.

He possessed an enquiring mind and was proving to be a model student. John soon improved his fluency in English and benefited from unofficial elocution lessons from Stanford and the boss, who constantly corrected his pronunciation and introduced him to new words. His insatiable appetite for learning impressed his teacher and his classmates.

The talents young John displayed weren't limited to his academic abilities. He excelled at sport and was always picked first for break-time team games. He was also renowned for his boxing prowess, though the school did not let pupils below standard three take part in official boxing classes and tournaments.

Soon, the end of term one was in sight. Norah planned to go with John to the village for Easter, as she'd promised Tadiwa and Aneni, but a complication arose. Easter fell in the middle of the April school holiday, and John was determined to spend his entire three-week break at the village. This worsened the already complicated transport issue, requiring separate journeys for John and Norah.

The boss came to the rescue, suggesting Mortimer would take John to the village and bring him back at holiday's end. But Norah would need to make her own travel arrangements for Easter.

When Norah spoke to Sandra about her travel situation, her friend came up with a solution. 'A visit to your village is not on my schedule, but Andrew and I often pass your turnoff on our rounds. If you replace Easter with a break at either end of the school holidays, you could travel one way with Mortimer, and the other with us. We can take you to your village or pick you up there.'

'But Sandra, the village is forty minutes from the turnoff.'

'Don't worry about it. That's what friends are for.'

Stanford was agreeable to the suggestion when Norah spoke to him. 'Good! That means this year, I will have Easter off.'

Norah chose the end of John's school holiday to attach her break, and Stanford allowed her a full week's leave. This arrangement set the pattern for John and Norah's future visits to the village.

John relished his three weeks of freedom in the village. Though it was only three months, it seemed ages since he was last there. How soon he'd forgotten the smell of the bush! He and his friends explored the area as often as possible, but Simba, Takunda, and Chipu had village chores that kept them busy for a part of each day. John didn't mind because that was his special time alone with Aneni.

Norah spent her week in the village chatting with Tadiwa and the other women, while John spent most of his time with Aneni and his friends. Since Elijah, the serial killer, was no longer a threat, peace settled on the area.

The big news was a boomslang killed a woman from a nearby village. She and two other women were returning to their village after visiting the local store next to the beerhall. A

sudden downpour caught them in the open, and they raced for shelter under a tree with low-hanging branches. The bright green snake was in the branches, and it bit the woman as she brushed past it. It was too late for her by the time medical help arrived.

Soon the holiday was over, and it was time for John's second term at school. He couldn't wait for his next visit to the village and looked forward to the Rhodes and Founders long weekend. But Norah forwent the long weekend because of its proximity to the August School holiday, when they would use the same arrangements as for their April visit. It disappointed John, but he understood his mother's decision.

The trade-off for Norah was that the extra leave she took during the school holidays would reduce her Christmas leave to three weeks. But John would spend almost seven weeks in the village before returning to the city with Norah to begin his second year of school.

Despite the four-week separation, Norah understood young John would have little to occupy himself with in the city while she and the other adults worked. At least in the village, he'd be with Tadiwa, Aneni, and his other young friends.

Tadiwa and the children always welcomed Norah's arrival in the village, but for Norah, it was bittersweet. She was conscious they saw her arrival as her coming to take John away again. In time, John's appreciation of city life made his departures less traumatic for him. But for Tadiwa and Aneni, it was always distressing because nothing compensated for John and his mother's departure.

The painful breaks made John and Aneni closer than ever, and they both lived for his next visit. John also looked forward to spending time with his village friends, Simba, Takunda, and Chipo. Each holiday they'd venture further and further from the village. The boys thought a girl tagging along would hold them back, but John would go nowhere without Aneni.

The school year ended, and John was eager for Mortimer to take him to the village, but he'd have to wait until Saturday when the boss didn't need his driver. Norah would stay in the city, assisting Stanford with the boss's cocktail parties and dinners.

Stanford and Norah sat with John under the shade of Stanford's veranda roof, eating their lunch and chatting, with the radio playing in the background. It was the one o'clock news, and the unmistakable voice of the prime minister silenced the little group. The air crackled with tensions as he stated, 'We, the Government of Rhodesia, do hereby declare...'

It was the eleventh November 1965, the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) when Rhodesia declared itself an independent sovereign nation free of British rule. Stanford and Norah sat in stunned silence. They were aware of the political argument surrounding the country's quest for independence, but hadn't felt threatened by it until now. What was its significance? What would happen? How might their lives be affected?

Minutes later, Philemon came racing around the corner of the house on his bicycle. 'Have you heard the news? The government has declared independence from Britain.'

'Yes, on the radio,' said Stanford.

'What will the Queen say?'

'We'll ask the boss when he gets home this evening.'

None of the little group was comfortable about the turn of events. Not because they wanted British rule or were against the Rhodesian government, but they feared how such a

momentous move might affect their cosy, organised lives. As they sat in the shade under the veranda roof, a stark contrast emerged between the tranquillity of their surroundings and the political turmoil swirling within the country. Each member of the group grappled with their own fears and uncertainties.

Judge Barclay returned home that evening to be greeted by a worried little delegation of his staff. Their furrowed brows and whispered exchanges alerted him to their concerns.

‘You don’t have to worry. When you wake up tomorrow morning, it will seem like nothing has changed. We’ll leave it to the Rhodesian and British governments to sort things out, and those types of negotiations go on forever. Stay calm. You still have your jobs, and we’ll carry on as if nothing has happened.’

‘Sir, will it be safe for Mortimer to take John to the village?’

‘Of course, Norah. There’s nothing to be worried about.’

The next night, at the boss’s Friday night dinner, Stanford and Norah were on duty, serving the learned guests. They overheard snippets of the excited chatter, a few pessimistic and sober, but others patriotically optimistic.

The boss spoke to the assembled guests. ‘Whatever happens, our duty is to carry on, regardless. The future of our country rests in the hands of politicians, not lawyers. So let’s stop speculating and enjoy another drink. Stanford, Norah, two more bottles of this wonderful sangiovese wine, if you please.’

‘Hear, hear, someone shouted.’

As the guests’ cheery farewells faded into the night, Philemon and Norah washed the dishes and tidied up the mess. When they were finished, they joined Stanford under the shelter of his veranda roof and engaged in a lively conversation while eating their dinner. John had gone to bed hours earlier.

‘The boss is right,’ said Stanford. ‘A whole day has passed, and the sky hasn’t fallen. There are no British soldiers shooting or planes bombing us. Everything will be fine.’ His words hung in the air like a fragile promise, bouncing between hope and apprehension.

Britain at once placed economic sanctions on Rhodesia, and in mid-December, The United Nations followed suit. World leaders, political commentators, and economists made dire forecasts for the future of the rebel colony, but the sanctions gave birth to an era of initiative and inventiveness. Rhodesia appeared to have entered a golden age of creativity and industrial development.

As days turned into weeks, and weeks into months, a sense of calm settled upon the country’s population, masking the storm that brewed in the distance. In 1966, the first minor terrorist incursions from Zambia failed, with little disruption to people’s lives. The United Nations Security Council resolution in April of the same year that Britain blockade the port of Beira to prevent oil flowing to Rhodesia also had little effect.

In August 1967, a large group of insurgents composed of ZIPRA and uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) fighters crossed the Zambezi River from Zambia into Rhodesia. The Rhodesian security forces soon dealt with the insurgents, but the event showed the situation in the country was becoming more serious. By September 1967, the South African Police (SAP) were in Rhodesia, helping to guard the Zambezi River border with Zambia.

Life remained unchanged for most Rhodesians, both black and white, though the length of basic training for military service and the frequency of call-ups increased for young white

males. Judge Barclay's household staff felt secure and gave little thought to the happenings across the *Zambian* and *Mozambique* borders.