

## On the Road Again

Living in Willsgrove, outside Bulawayo, raised questions about transport. Though only a fifteen-minute drive from the CBD, a return home for lunch meant the accumulated driving time was high for those days. The adults got a one-hour lunch break, which was split into three segments. Twenty minutes for picking up the kids and driving home, twenty minutes to eat a rushed lunch, and a further twenty minutes to get back to the office. The adults returned to work, secure in the knowledge the kids were home and not getting up to mischief in town. But what about mischief at home? Well, that's another story.

The saloon cars needed manual gear changes and came with bench seats and no seatbelts. They accommodated more passengers than modern saloons, where the number of seatbelts determines a car's passenger capacity. My uncle, aunt, and cousin Yvonne sat in the front, and my mother, and cousins Peter and Jean, sat with me in the back. From my position in the back seat, I could watch my uncle change gears and soon learnt the gear positions and when to change them.

In my first year in Willsgrove, my uncle drove a rounded-shaped Vauxhall Velox with the traditional chrome teardrops running along each side of the bonnet. I only ever saw the popular model in black. Though similar in appearance, the less powerful, and rarer Vauxhall Wyvern, was often burgundy in colour.

The drives to and from the city on the quiet semi-rural road encouraged family conversation, only rivalled at the dinner table at home. Memorable songs on the car radio stick with me to this day. These included Slim Whitman's *Indian Love Call* and Bonnie Lou's *The Tennessee Wig Walk*.

One morning, the ever-reliable Velox could only move at a walking pace, so we headed for the garage at Waterford. We'd be late for school and work, so my uncle tasked Peter to run ahead and alert the garage to prepare for action, much like pitting in a Grand Prix.

Peter raced off, only to end up exhausted, back in the car. Now came my turn. I loved running and sprinted away, but to no avail. Puffed out, by the time I got my breath back, enabling me to speak, my uncle's car rolled into the garage, saving me the trouble.

Apart from that single episode, the old Velox never failed us. Despite this, a newer sky-blue Velox replaced it the following year. Longer and more spacious than the rounded black Velox, and the last model to carry the traditional chrome bonnet teardrops, it lacked the charm of the old black one. I soon lost interest in watching the gear changes.

Even back then, General Motors and Ford drivers argued the merits of their brands. The males in our family steadfastly dismissed the creamy-beige Ford Consuls and two-tone Zephyrs.

In Rhodesia, this was the era of British cars. Other popular cars included the Morris Minor and Morris Oxford, Austin A30 and A35, Standard Vanguard, Triumph Mayflower, Rover P4, Jaguar XK series, Humber Super Snipe, and Hillman Minx. The ever-quirky French Citroen mounted its front doors hinged on the centre column, which meant the door was behind you as you stepped out of the vehicle. But the overall design was one for the traditionalists. The sports cars included the Austin-Healey 100, MGA, and Triumph TR2 and TR3.

Cars aside, a reliable bus service ran between the city and Waterford. One day, standing on the corner of Grey Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, I waited for the bus to go home to Willsgrove. An old African man approached me and asked for sixpence to buy food. Sixpence was all I had, the cost of the bus fare. I thought, 'What the heck!' Late in the school holidays, I had nothing much to do and loved walking, so I gave him the coin. I was eleven years old and full of energy and enjoyed the late morning sun and fresh air.

Later, my mother bought me a Phillips drop-handlebar bicycle with Derailleur gears, allowing me to choose between ten different settings. The bicycle was not lightweight, and I believe they'd put the drop handlebars and Derailleur gears on a regular Phillips frame. In the main, Bulawayo is flat, so I seldom needed to change the gears. The drop handlebars required a different riding position, which I found uncomfortable, so my cycling fell away.

Despite my bicycle, the bus service, and my uncle's car, the bright lights of the city called like a giant candle to human moths. Cricket and other extra curricula activities took up most afternoons. Time for a more practical approach to bridging the gap between Willsgrove and Bulawayo. After two memorable years in the bush, my mother and I moved into a small flat in Garden Court, on the corner of Grey Street and 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue.