

## IT'S ALL IN THE TIMING...

For most of my teenage years, I lived in a flat on Wilson Street in Bulawayo. At first, on the corner of Selborne Avenue, and later, opposite Mike Barker's guitar studio on the corner of 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

I liked school. Not so much the dusty classrooms, but the sports fields and tennis courts. We all lived for Friday, the test run for Saturday night. On Friday night, we faced two possibilities: either out with friends, warming up for Saturday night, or at home, savouring the prospect of the weekend's high points.

The best weekend needed a Saturday night party. Even a dozen friends in someone's lounge, dancing to the latest hit tunes on a record player with a tinny treble, was better than a night at home, wondering what your pals were doing.

My preference was an organised dance with three guitars and drums. Each weekend, you needed to find out where the rock sessions were. These events occurred in various halls in Bulawayo: in the Trade Fair grounds, the Drill Hall, the Jewish Guild Hall, the Small and Large City Hall, and many more. With luck, my favourite band, The Stereos, would be playing.

One Saturday morning on my way to the record shops in town, I bumped into Phil, a school friend. He planned to attend the jazz festival in the Large City Hall. I didn't like jazz, but he persuaded me to join him for a short time. Although reluctant to waste even an hour of the weekend, I agreed. We ended up staying late into the night and all of Sunday.

On other occasions in the Large City Hall, we'd go to listen to Des and Dawn Lindberg on one of their annual tours or watch some visiting hypnotist or other. My last visit there was for a boxing tournament, complete with young ladies in hot pants carrying placards showing the upcoming round. So many activities in Bulawayo! Never a dull moment!

A lively group of thespians supported The Bulawayo Theatre Club on the corner of Centenary Park. I remember The African Follies, starring Irene Batchelor, and later, The Royal Hunt of the Sun, starring John Bardo. To encourage young people to take an interest in acting, the theatre club fostered a group called The Young Questors.

My friend John was a keen member of The Young Questors and invited me to go with him one evening to watch them at rehearsals. I wasn't into acting but agreed to go after he assured me I needn't get involved; no audience participation, so to speak. Just my luck! They were short of members that night, and they coerced me into making up the numbers. The evening confirmed that Hollywood was not for me. On the bright side, my reward was an invitation to one of their chic cocktail functions held in the theatre club's foyer.

What is it about Saturday nights that makes you agree to things you wouldn't under normal circumstances? Beer or wine, perhaps? At the cocktail party, I bumped into Desmond, a boy I knew from school. He also was a member of The Young Questors. As the party warmed up and the chatter grew louder, he regaled me with the pleasures of an early morning dip in the first week of the swimming season. 'With winter ending,' he argued, 'it would be the best start to the school week.'

'Yeah, Monday's fine,' I said, sipping my wine, without intending to make it a firm commitment. No one takes those Saturday-night party arrangements seriously, do they?

Sunday night, time for second thoughts. Desmond probably didn't mean it, and even if he did, he'd have forgotten about it by now. Monday morning, five-thirty, I still clung to those thoughts. Mum said, if he were a reliable person, I needed to keep the arrangement. Damn! Yes, he was a reliable person, and I didn't know him well enough to let him down.

I arrived at the Borrow Street Baths fifteen minutes early. That way, if he was one minute late, I'd leave with a clear conscience. I'd say I waited over a quarter of an hour before I left. That sounded good to me.

Oh, no! Desmond, reliable as ever, turned up on his bike. Too late to hide and pretend I'd already gone before he arrived.

If you know Bulawayo, you'll recall how chilly the mornings are at the start of the swimming season. I paid my entrance fee, resigned to what was to come, like someone going to a firing squad. With only swimming trunks and a towel to keep from freezing, the gentle breeze chilled us. Worse still, a swirling, heavy fog lay on the water, masking the opposite side. The scene looked straight out of an American horror movie. No turning back now. The strong smell of chlorine somehow lacked the charm it held on warm summer days. Standing on the edge of the pool on the icy sandstone tiles, my legs and back grew colder, and a shiver ran through me. Just then, Desmond dived in, and I felt obliged to follow.

Shock! Horror! Hang on a sec! The unheated pool, exposed to the elements all night, felt like a warm bath. The water temperature was much higher than the air temperature. I wanted to stay in the pool, like one of those Japanese monkeys sitting in the hot springs surrounded by snow, but school beckoned. I raced home and changed into my Milton High uniform and cycled down Selborne Avenue. Never was I so alive and full of energy. Perhaps I could even concentrate in class. I resolved that from now on, we'd do this every morning.

For the next two weeks, on schooldays, we met each morning for an early morning swim. But all good things must end. The invigorating effect soon diminished, and the water seemed to get cooler. Little by little, the early morning swims became less frequent, and within three or four weeks, they were history.

Under normal circumstances, I wouldn't agree to something only crazy people do, but that Saturday night at the theatre club was fun, and Monday morning, forever away. It was all down to the timing.