

## Chapter 5

9 September. We're planning to catch the coach down to Dodoma. (I have to admit, by the way, that this trip was pure self-indulgence. I spent the first 12 years of my life in Dodoma and had never been back.) Up at 5 am, at the coach station 6.30 for a 7 am coach. We wait. Lots of local buses come and go, with a few coaches to Tabora and Moshi. Nothing for Dodoma. 8 am; we are still waiting. Felix reminds us that this is Tanzania. We find somewhere to sit.

9 am, Felix ascertains that the coach has sustained a puncture. No idea when it is going to arrive. I buy a Louis Vuitton watch from the stand. It goes for another day and a half, but what do you expect for £3? I should have got the Omega from round the corner. 10 am, this is still Tanzania, looking suspiciously as if it is still Arusha. 10.30, the coach arrives. A dozen people try to bag our seats, but the nice conductor fights them off and we board.

The coach was only a little bit over-full, with a few large cans placed in the aisle to sit on. The scenery was mostly very dry, with a few spectacular rocky outcrops around Singida.

Entertainment was provided when the bus stopped and a dozen men and ladies sprinted out into the bush. I thought they were all late for the party, but in fact each was finding a bush to hide behind for the necessary purpose. There were a couple of babies left under a blanket to do their necessities, too. You now understand the origin and meaning of the term "bush stop".

Further entertainment was provided by the lady who boarded with a live chicken trussed upside down under her arm. Said chicken glared at me as if it was my fault, and dug its claws into Kate's hair every now and again.

It was a long journey, and we pulled into Dodoma just after dark. Felix had assured me that the coach station was close to the cathedral and the Jamat Khan mosque, both of which I knew well, so all we had to do was walk across the railway level crossing. Ahem; the mosque was



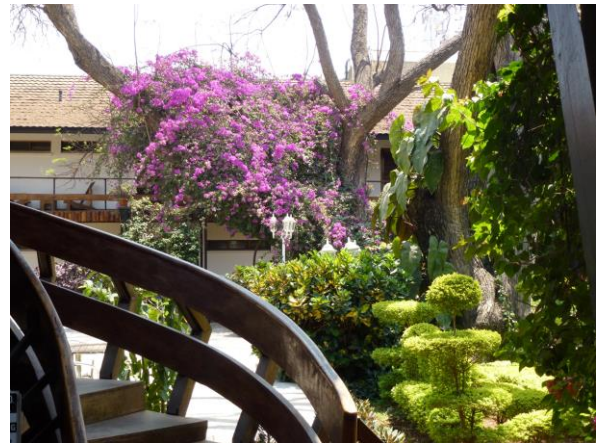
Yes, we have no bananas – no coach either



New Dodoma Hotel

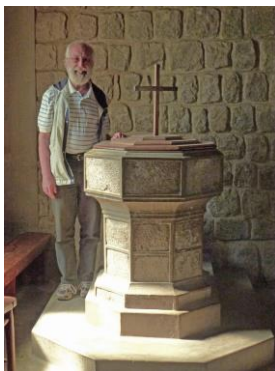
not that close, not even visible from the arrival point. We picked up a guide, who led us round a fence and onto the railway tracks just in front of the station, which I recognized immediately. Being accustomed to it, and knowing that trains hardly ever ran these days, and seeing loads of locals doing the same thing, I blithely stepped the baggage over the tracks, but the girls were petrified. We exited the station and crossed the road to the New Dodoma Hotel, which used to be just the Dodoma Hotel. Both the hotel and the station are handsome buildings dating

from German colonial days, but the hotel has now acquired a very handsome courtyard and even a swimming pool. In my day the nearest swimming pool was 40 km away in Mvumi. The rooms are nice too, but Dodoma is in mosquito territory, so every night the rooms get sprayed and we used mosquito nets.



Hot shower! Wash hair! Flush loo! Plate of chips for Kate! (Poor girl – Tanzanian food was not really what she wanted.)

10 September. Both my father and I were baptized in Dodoma Cathedral, and I wanted to find the register. We cross the railway properly at the level crossing and head into town. We find the Cathedral office, but the register was long lost. Jacky makes them promise to have a hunt.



We go back into the Cathedral building, and I lose myself awhile in growing up again. Dodoma Cathedral has an interesting story. The architect envisioned a central dome of stone supported on 12



Dodoma Cathedral



pillars, but he was not confident of the design, so he built a smaller version first. Though you would not know it now, because it has been considerably extended, that little version became the present-day Arusha Cathedral.



We emerge into bright sunlight, and head for the coach station to buy return tickets. We get lost around Nyerere Square and pick up a group of Masai to guide us. The local tribe is actually the Wagogo, but the Masai are a much smarter lot and they are everywhere. Their natural habitat is the



border between Tanzania and Kenya, where they herd cattle. They are pretty good at herding tourists, too. We buy tickets for the Champion coach, as recommended by Felix, and follow the Masai to a trinket stall where the girls get busy.



It's getting very hot by now so we walk back past the cathedral and over the railway line to the hotel.



We find some lunch and then relax around the pool. We are joined by a bright red dragonfly.





In the afternoon we set off for the destination of destinations, my old home. We walk up what used to be Station Road...

At the crossroads, I get this shivering feeling. This is the junction with what used to be Cassia Avenue, and is now Birenge Road. On the corner is still the house where the Archdeacon used to live with two Pekinese dogs and where I first went to Sunday School. Three houses up and there we are. There is still some manyara in the hedge (manyara is the Swahili name for a bushy species of Euphorbia), but there is now a gate on the drive and a sign "Beware of the dog". Rosalind, bless her, ignores the sign and



up Station Road...



Manyara hedge



advances to ask if we can come in. The watchman calls for Mama Betty. Mama Betty turns out to be Russian, a visiting Professor of Physical Chemistry at UDOM (Dodoma University). Her real name is Svetlana, but the dog of which we have to "beware" is an ancient half-blind Pekinese called Betty, so her owner is Mama Betty. Prof. Betty is very happy to see us, and I get the feeling that Europeans feel a bit isolated here. She shows us round the house, which has been extended, but still boasts the huge sitting room. In the garden, the trees seem familiar, but not quite the same. There indeed are the flamboyant tree, the bougainvillea and the frangipani, but what has happened over the years is that the trees have been cut down and replaced by the same kind. It gives me the surreal feeling that the garden has picked itself up and gone for a walk. There are other trees now, a coconut palm and a jackfruit tree, and swing and seesaw used to be.

We depart with reluctance as the sun is setting. Cassia Avenue was with the sunset over the little hill in the distance. The sun is still setting in the right place. Another throat lump.

