

Learning about WI — in Zimbabwe

Have you ever had a dream? I decided to do something about one of my dreams, and recently returned from visiting my pen pal of nearly 13 years, a W.I. member in Harare, Zimbabwe!

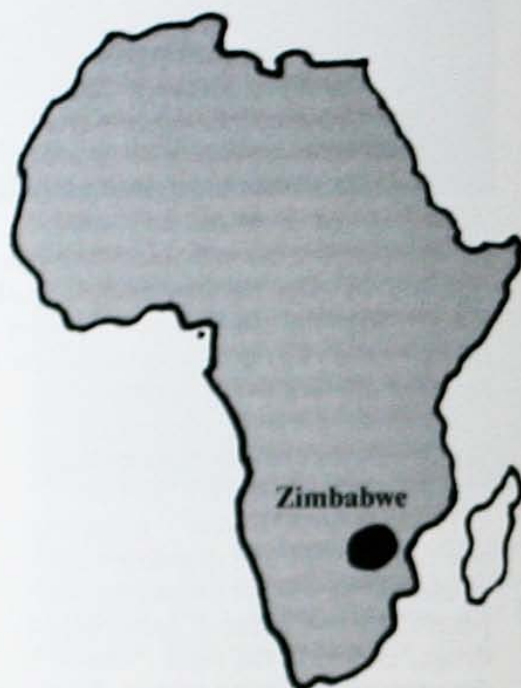
The questions people asked were all the same, "Wherever is Zimbabwe?" "Are the people white?" "Do they speak English?" "Don't you think you'll be shot going to Africa?"

I answered those questions many times in the three months after purchasing my ticket for my evening February 6th flight. "Zimbabwe is an inland country in south-central Africa — formerly called Rhodesia." "The majority of the population is black, but my pen pal and members of her W.I. were all white." "Yes, Gwen and the ladies all speak English, although I found some of their expressions a bit different from ours." "I guess I'm a bit of an adventurer, but I also believe most of the press reports we receive in Canada show the very worst situations all over the world."

We arrived in Harare at 6:40 a.m. Saturday morning with 18 degrees C. temperature. I had been in the same clothes for two nights and part of three days, and can't say I looked my best. But it was indeed a happy moment to finally meet Gwen Sutherland, my long-time pen pal. We recognized each other immediately, from the many photos we had exchanged. I must admit her bathtub and bed both looked very inviting — so after a bath and 2-hour nap, I was refreshed and ready to start my whirlwind tour of Zimbabwe and meet so many new Institute friends.

A visit to a Game Farm and Lion Park near Harare with Gwen gave me my first opportunity to see African wildlife up close. Then I was introduced to my hostess Beryl Boaler, National Secretary, at whose home I made my headquarters. Beryl and I went to Bulawayo, a distance of 441 km. south-west of Harare where we stayed for three days. Here I attended my first W.I. meeting in Zimbabwe at Hillside. It was interesting to hear differences in their meetings and ours. First, they had never heard of our Institute Ode, so

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I quickly gave them copies of the words. They don't have roll calls. Their branches have a Chairman whom they call Madame Chair. The only president they have is the national president. They have a Counsellor, whose duties are much like our District Director. Their five conveners are Education, Creative Arts, Agriculture & Home Economics, Public Health, Social Services. Each of these conveners gives a very detailed report at each meeting. Nearly all of the branches own their own hall where they meet. Right now they are deciding on a national project which may be donating money for the purchase of hearing aids for deaf children, so all branches are having special money-raising activities to aid this cause. Most meetings are in the morning or afternoon. The Mary Stewart Collect is often read by one member, rather than by everyone in unison. The group at Hillside own and support a library and were having trouble with white ants chewing books and also library shelves.

I was invited to speak at each meeting I attended, and often showed

slides as well. They were very interested in Canada and in our Institutes, especially of our roots, so the slides of the Erland Lee Home and Hunter Hoodless Home were well shown. They were also pleased to receive Canadian postage stamps I took along, and other Canadian souvenirs. It seemed, however, with every item I gave away, I was given two more in return to bring home.

At the meeting of the Meyrick Park/Mabelreign W.I., of which Gwen is a member, I sang a solo of the "Institute Ode". I then presented Gwen with an F.W.I.O. pin and a framed certificate making her an honorary member of our branch, the Lynnville W.I. Their P.R.O. was given a Member of Honor badge as she is leaving the country. They talked about the Buckle-up baby project and I explained to them what our Nova Scotia W.I. had done here on this project. Unfortunately, seat belts are not easily available for cars that are not already equipped with them in their country, so a law is impossible to enforce. The convener on Health had attended a child spacing clinic, but reported that the African still considers a family of six normal. The convener of Creative Arts told members they would tour the telephone company next month. This brought quite a stir from the ladies, as their telephones don't operate most of the time, due to the rainy weather and outdated equipment!

I then had the opportunity to meet Maureen de la Hunt, editor of their Home & Country magazine. This was the day to make 800 copies each of p. 15-16-17, the material had been put on a stencil and because the paper has been re-cycled so many times, it is very difficult to run through their Rex-Rotary duplicator. All pages must be fanned and counted and there were many jam-ups. It seemed like a very difficult process, but the National magazine is important for each member to receive.

Very quickly three weeks were over, but what lovely memories and my dream had come true! Many thanks to Gwen Sutherland and all my new Zimbabwe friends for a fantastic holiday!