

Zimbabwe

As my five-year term as Bishop of the Pleasant View First Ward of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was approaching, Ida-Rose and I started planning to go on a mission.

It so happened that Richard L. Evans and his sister who was in the General Relief Society Presidency toured Zimbabwe to see what conditions were like there as the war between the blacks and whites had now ended.

One thing they noted was that there had been no market for the black ladies who did beautiful crochet work. Many whites were leaving to get away from Zimbabwe and its terrible dictator. Some considered immigrating to such countries as South Africa, Canada, England, Australia, or the United States. The latter would be the hardest one to emigrate to. Then there were many others who only had one option and that was to stay put.

Arnold and Helen Lucas wanted someone to “baby sit” their home for one full year while they could consider their options. Our only obligations were to pay a modest rent and take care of collecting the rent on two apartments that he owned, and were to take care of the home and fix things that needed to be fixed. Additionally, the Lucas family had a boy who kept up the yard and did other chores. We were to pay him 25 Zimbabwe dollars once per month. Well, here we were living in a lovely home. Many of the other missionaries did not have good digs.

How fortunate we were to teach the black ladies in the ward to quilt. Over time, I built nine sets of quilting frames. To start things off, we paid for everything to get started. Batts were needed to place between the top and bottom pieces of cloth. Batts were not available in South Africa or Zimbabwe so the General Relief Society in Salt Lake City sent one batt to help us get along. Good cloth was available in Zimbabwe, so that was no problem. They made baby quilts to begin with and later made some full-size quilts.

Meanwhile, we continued to work with the blacks in the church to teach them how to run the church organization principles. Also, we carried the gospel message from door to door. We were not supposed to stray for safety’s sake and could not travel any farther than 35 kilometers away from the church headquarters, but that went down the drain. I can remember, on one occasion, that we were out in the sticks on a pitch black night and we said to ourselves that we are only two white people standing here while there are 20 millions Blacks out there. We loved Zimbabwe and its people and cried when it was time to leave. Some made money on their quilts.

Missionaries were only allowed to spend one year in Zimbabwe, so we were sent to South Africa for the final six months of our mission.

There was apartheid in Africa at the time that we were there. There were Whites, Colords, Blacks, Indians, and each of them was supposed to keep to their territory. We did not have any troubles in this respect. We being white could go anywhere but that could be risky at times. Our mission president moved us around a lot just to get a feeling for the areas. We had only one convert. Many Whites still regard Blacks as inferior people.

One time in Africa, there happened to be some members in the church. Having found that out one of the church members connected us up with the DeBeers organization. They treated us like royalty, gave us an apartment with a maid and a parking place. They spent more than two days showing us the sights. One interesting thing that occurred was the fact

that Mr. Openheimer knew that I was the first man to make diamonds some years ago at the General Electric Company.