
rifle. Nevertheless, his young wife and their six-month-old baby left England to join him.

"We arrived in Beira, on the Mozambique coast," Miss Park said. "They had just built the railway to the Zambezi River. We got on the train, but there was a flood, and part of the track had washed away. It was a fairly adventurous journey. We had to cross the Zambezi, in flood, in a little boat, because the paddle steamer wasn't working, or perhaps it had sunk.... We then got into a lorry and drove for three days."

Shortly after their arrival, John Park walked on to Tanganyika. "It was thought that there was gold in the Lupa River, so he went off prospecting, and, indeed, he found alluvial gold. So he sent for my mother and me, and we took a boat that went up Lake Nyasa. When we got to the landing place, at Mwaya, my father wasn't there – he'd miscalculated the date of our arrival. We camped for two days on the shore, where I was an object of some interest, as I was the first white child ever seen there." The reunited family then set out for the Lupa, Doreen Park travelling part of the way in a machila, or hammock swung on a pole, and Daphne on people's shoulders. "We walked for about ten days, I think, through very wild country, some of it quite beautiful. The Lupa ran through lion country – lots of lions, lots of prickly bushes, and very dry, very little water. My parents built a mud hut, and we lived in it until I was about three. My father made enough from panning for gold for us to survive, and my mother planted a garden."

Doreen Park discovered that she was pregnant again, and undertook the long trek back to England. She bore a small, delicate boy, and returned with him to her family in Africa. The Parks realized that living in such conditions was not going to be good for the children, and so decided that while John would continue to pan for gold his wife would move to the highlands and grow coffee. "They rented land at Kayuki, which means 'the place of bees,' and my mother ran the coffee plantation and grew arabica and robusta. She sent food for my father's laborers – a four-day trip – and my father sent her the gold. It was an astonishingly honest world in those days, and the gold was generally sent by runner. My father would walk to the farm once every three or four months and stay for several days; otherwise, my mother and brother and I lived entirely alone." The house on the coffee plantation was built of mud brick, with a roof of thatch and corrugated iron, and it acquired, over the years, a Rubberoid floor and a porcelain bathtub with taps but no running water.

The family's self-contained life – they were ten miles, or a good day's walk, from their nearest European neighbors – affected Daphne most markedly in two ways: she was able to indulge a precocious appetite for books, and she came to rely almost entirely on her own resources. Her voracious reading as a child was supplemented by a correspondence course conducted by the Bishop of Tanganyika's daughter for children who were living in the wilds. Each lesson took about ten days to arrive, being sent by lorry, train, and finally runner; sometimes the books were damp, if the runner had fallen into a river on the way. "It was wonderful. I read lots of history, lots of English literature. I loved classics, but mathematics was a disaster. The teaching was very good, too – lots of comments. And then there came a day when the correspondence people wrote to my mother and said, 'You've got to send this child to school.' I was almost eleven. So my mother and father conferred, and it was arranged that I would go to England with some friends of theirs... In Dar es Salaam, I switched on my first electric light and pulled my first loo chain. I wasn't to go back to Africa for years and years. There was no money for me to go back, or for my parents to come to me. My mother's mother and my two great-aunts became my guardians."

"Africa left very little immediate impression on me. Curiously, the first time that my memories of Africa came to me with real intensity was much later, when I was studying Russian at Cambridge. I had been asked to write an essay on my childhood. It was my first Russian essay, and I had to look up every single word and grammatical construction. Consequently, I wrote with more concentration than I have probably ever written in my life. I found that what I wanted to describe was what I had almost forgotten I had ever been aware of: night sounds, like frogs, crickets, drums; the fingering of the sun when it was really hot; the sound of rain on corrugated-iron roofs. I suddenly realized that it was all there somewhere, at the back of my consciousness. When I eventually went back to Africa, I accepted a lot of things that other people found frightening. It didn't occur to me to worry about living alone there, for example – it wasn't a place where I was ever frightened. I loved Africa, but I can also remember periods of intense frustration and boredom, because there was no one to talk to.

I grew up solitary. I wanted to ask questions, I wanted to sharpen my mind. When I first came to England, the thing I most loved was having my mind sharpened with lots of new arguments and ideas."