

A SECOND MEETING Amelia Earl

I met him first over fifty years ago not long after he returned from the jungle. When I was told I was going to meet him I thought he would look like a monkey. Well, I was only four years old! Television was in its infancy and books were not as pictorial or colourful as today nor did we travel anything like people do now. What was I to think, jungle meant monkeys, elephants, trees, Tarzan and Jane. Okay looking back I now see why everyone laughed, but hey he was thirteen and thought he was coming back to concrete city full of flats with no pets of any kind.

John is his name born in the jungle in Africa, son of Anna and Gerard Brighton. The Brightons had gone out for one year after their wedding but actually stayed twenty-five years instead. As they were both teachers they felt they could use their talents to set up a school out in Africa in 1932. The trip out to the part of Africa from England had taken twenty-nine days. The Brighton's had received a collective wedding present to help fund their school. By the time they came home again, six schools and five orphanages were going strong.

Over the years I remember hearing stories of their adventures, of John having an elephant as a pet. He would ride around and play with it as I would play with our dog. The elephant was his chauffeur it would take him to school and be there to collect him. Imagine instead of all the parents nowadays in their cars a long line of elephants, well at least the Green Party would be pleased. Monkeys would play on their veranda taking things and hiding them. This was a great game of hide and seek as far as John was concerned, not so according to the adults.

The hard work and dedication of Anna and Gerard John often found overwhelming. He would say that growing up he had had to share his parents a bit too much. Though it did also feel like having plenty of brothers and sisters to spoil him. Even though Anna and Gerard worked so hard they both lived well into their eighties. Maybe that is



the secret to long life -- plain hard work, strange food, joy in your work.

Anna and Gerard had taught John till he was thirteen years old but felt it was time they returned home for him to finish his schooling. School in Britain was far different to Africa. In Africa you were lucky to have one book, a slate and a piece a chalk. You sat on the floor and the things were not so strict. John is no saint -- the term rascal would suit him far better. Imagine a uniform, table and chair, strict timetable -- difficult was not the word. The teachers did not find the task any easier. Though within days John had managed to find a way around students and teachers alike, his adventures and knowledge of the wild life of Africa could keep everyone on the edge of their seats and make them completely forget they should be in maths or history lesson. He had won them over.

John and I would send the usual Christmas and holiday cards. It had all started with our parents, we had the odd telephone conversation usually with family news. Out of the blue one day John rang, he had been invited back to the first school his parents had opened to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of its opening. Would I like come too?

I am shaking with happiness as I now sit in the airport about to fly to London to meet up with John. He now lives in Scotland. Then a journey of twenty-nine hours including a night stop over to where we are to be welcomed in Africa. How times have changed, I wonder have we !!!