

HOMeward BOUND – A LIVERPOOL-WEST AFRICA MARITIME HERITAGE INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Mrs Pamela Jean Jones

Interviewer: Nick White

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File Name: JJHB01 – JJHB02

[07:16] Involvement with EDs in 1956 Nigeria as a secretary, met husband – beach staff for ED in Lagos – returned to UK married and returned to Nigeria as Elder's wife; [9:30] Why Nigeria – adventure and wanted to broaden experience, the culture shock – a completely different way of life; [11:39] difficulty in trusting and accepting people because of the degree of poverty – very sad and explains level of corruption; [13:00] employed stewards and cooks and tried to improve their lives within own circle; [14:15] felt more at home in Nigeria – people smiling and deferential, felt isolated in Ghana and Sierra Leone; [15:13] Husbands life and agency operations, moved from agency to agency as required, 4 times in 1 year, exacting job – EDs very busy; [17:15] eye-opening experience, met many characters, found it a very structured society and difficult to make lasting friendships as they moved around so frequently; [19:20] agent lived apart from the compound, differences in hierarchy and class were very structured; [20:12] Africanisation led to Africans heading ministries and sadly things started to deteriorate; [20:50] nature of work, never a 9-5 job, very long hours but good social life in Port Harcourt and Lagos through the club – purely Europeans; [23:00] how met husband, rugby match and a blind date; [24:30] lived towards your leave, never put down roots – company accommodation was excellent but never your own; [26:00] length of tours – 10 month short tour to 16 month long tour with 3 months leave dependent upon length of tour, very similar to government service though there it was an 18 month tour which could be terminated after 1 year; [28:00] Freetown, Sierra Leone, unhappy time, limited contact with people – only neighbours, children at school and families not welcome in the club; [29:30] division between Creoles and other Sierra Leoneans led to ill-feeling between the two groups, never felt at home or accepted, return to establish a home in the UK and husband John followed 3 months later as unhappy in Africa alone; [34:00] domestic arrangements – nanny in Port Harcourt, working for BP with a 5 year-old son and a 3 year-old daughter on a 10 month tour; [37:00] husband John became persona non grata under Nkrumah and was forced to leave even though he was innocent, 2 or 3 others were also forced to leave – company very good and got them out within 12 hours – very frightening; [40:00] increased feeling of insecurity, volatile situation, feeling very exposed around 1961-2 and the 'Congo' times; [41:00] domestic arrangements – nanny, cook and 'boy' who did 'dirty jobs', accommodation on compound, 1 room and kitchen, toilet and shower facilities, 2 'boys' per house on the compound, cooking was done for them, nanny cleaned and tidied, looked after nursery, 'boy' did washing and ironing, air-conditioning in accommodation and in bedrooms, first in accommodation chose the décor so you lived with other's choices, first tour in Port Harcourt stayed in rented accommodation which was pretty grotty so company redecorated for them, night watchman on compound – burglary was common, they employed their own staff who were forced to move for income, took food and income home to their families; [49:00] schooling and medical facilities – Sierra Leone 1 doctor employed by the company, paid for schooling – not cheap, not usual to keep children on the coast after the age of 7 – expected to be boarders after 7 and company contributed to fees, schooling provision was mixed – some good, Port Harcourt good as very lucky there with the big Shell presence, there was also a hospital, suffered a miscarriage in Lagos and taken to an African hospital where staff extorted money from patients to meet their basic needs;

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[55:00] social life in Port Harcourt and Lagos – initially as a single girl – club just across road from flat, within EDs slightly less marked divisions in social groups; [58:00] corruption in government in Nigeria and divisions between ethnic groups; [59:43] Africanisation – slowly changed the corridors of power – very manipulative, different ethnic groups didn't get on together and worked against each other, nepotism and corruption not talent characterised government; [1:00:03] ED advanced Africanisation of staff, not the same level of corruption present as need for specific skills; [1:00:06] visit up country to a friend, roads difficult, beauty of landscape, incredible storms, no electricity – kerosene fridge - very basic, hear drums from neighbouring African village, very different way of life outside the major built-up areas; [1:10:00] leisure time as single woman in Lagos, shops – everything you could want.

Part two

Voyages a fabulous experience, allowed you to 'break in' slowly to the different climate and people, pecking order on the boats very evident with government and commercial travellers; [2:50] entertainment – film nights, concert nights, cards, snooker, fancy dress, dinner – always some form of entertainment, endless supply of food, children's facilities were great – pictures on plates encouraged children to eat up to reveal the pictures, excellent food and booze – men in dressing gowns in the bar for a 'hair of the dog', swimming and tennis, strolling the deck, difference on board; Tamele (cargo/passenger ship) approximately 30 passengers mostly nuns and priests – limited facilities for entertainment; [7:20] everyone asked to 'do a turn'; [8:00] John maintained links with seafarers from his time with Blue Funnel; [9:40] first journey home by sea while pregnant – sea sickness and bad weather; [11:20] mail boat, mainly civil servants - African government officials who boarded in top hats with umbrellas and suits and as journey progressed became increasingly African in their dress and behaviour; [12:45] different ethnic groups and nationalities on board ships – any differences were managed and held together because of the discipline of the officers; [12:30] Sierra Leone 'Kru boys'; [14:00] no knowledge of cargo content; [15:00] only allowed on shore at Las Palmas but people were allowed on board to sell wares at other stops; [16:30] no beaches at Port Harcourt like Lagos or Ghana but a good community; [12:15] John working up the creeks at tanker port in Bonny and Jean in Port Harcourt, he'd come back or she'd go up on alternate weekends; [18:50] memories of diesel fumes, sights of hippos, crocs, mangroves, many buried in Bonny with names from well-known families succumbed to malaria or yellow fever – modernisation didn't remove the smell of the swamps; [22:00] maintained friendships with just a few people through the Elders or sea captains; [25:00] common experience of the sea, strong impact on lives and a strong bond; [26:00] followed the history of ED – containerisation – not ships anymore, end of ED in 1989 caused a sad feeling; [27:50] friends kept her informed of changes; [28:21] abiding memories and impressions of ED – ethos very good, head office was brilliant – looked after everybody, followed on from the Blue Funnel tradition – expecting high standards but looked after staff so that they could meet the standard, very lucky in the way they were looked after, John's expulsion from Ghana was later rescinded, humanity to the organisation followed on from head office through the agents and down through the ethos and the way they treated people – nothing but praise for the way they were looked after; [31:00] Nigerians her favourite, liked Ghanaians too but so much going on with the curfew and couldn't mention Nkrumah or might be 'carted off' – he went to incredible lengths to maintain control.

END OF INTERVIEW