

Will we go to Muff in Northern Ireland, or to Wankie in Zimbabwe?

After a real crusher of a landing, the flight attendant got on the intercom and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, please remain in your seats until Captain Crash and the crew have brought the aircraft to a screeching halt up against the gate. And, once the tire smoke has cleared, and the warning bells are silenced, we'll open the door and you can pick your way through the wreckage to the terminal."

When asked to depart immediately for an assignment, one must think hard, or at least quickly research, to find out where it is. We can find ourselves in places that only recently we had not heard of. A few of us from different parts of the World, found ourselves in such a place. We checked our atlases before embarking, but still only had vague ideas of the location. After four days of travel in a number of aircraft and motor vehicles from northern Queensland to Brisbane, Kuala Lumpur, Delhi, Guwahati, and eventually, Imphal, and having waited interminably in boring hotels and featureless airports, I arrived somewhere between Bangladesh and Burma, and beneath the Himalayas. I had discovered Manipur, the home of polo. Whilst still in Imphal, in the year 2000, I met the man from Zimbabwe.

The Warp

6. THE MAN FROM ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe? Where's That?

At least Rhodesian is easier to say than Zimbabwean!

Who said this? Some very rude colleagues.

Everyone else has been at work some time when he walks into the project office. Morning is not his best, nor is it his favourite time of the day. He is tall, sort of angular, and has the beginnings of a small paunch. His hair is wiry, brown-grey, and somewhat distinguished in a dishevelled kind of way. Beneath the hair lives a long white man's face, mildly craggy but roughly handsome. It would look good on the Marlborough man. The wire-framed glasses have seen better days but even so, they add a kind of respectability to his appearance. His jaw line is longish and strong and behind the fine lips, he unconsciously grinds his tobacco stained teeth and sucks at spaces or the remains of breakfast.

As our Bengali, Manipuri and Naga colleagues greet the man with genuine enthusiasm and friendship, I appraise his clothes. The drab green, cotton bush shirt had

epaulettes, one without a button, and pockets with flaps and buttons. He has mis-aligned the buttons at the front of the shirt, and the top one rides higher than it should. On him, it is as it should be. There are spots of cigarette ash across the front of his shirt and several old and well-laundered burns from previous assaults.

The worn, almost annihilated belt is far too long for his waist and hangs languidly from a belt loop that soon will separate from the waistband. On one side of centre, the waistband has rolled over the belt to exhibit the white and frayed trouser lining. One of his pockets is partly detached from the inside of his trousers and is trying hard, complete with handkerchief, to get out. Moving down, the trousers are several shades of drab, grey-green, and appear to be un-ironed, but I know this is not true. They are several centimetres too short for his one hundred and ninety centimetre frame. Our domestic helpers, Manipuri and Nepalese, are not good with the iron. Skinny white ankles hang out of his trousers and further down begin their relationship with the dilapidated, brown cloth, lace-up shoes. One shoe is not laced, and the other will be unlaced soon because the lace in it is frayed and thin. I cannot see any socks.

When he speaks, he commands attention. This is not necessarily because of what he says, although that often is notable, but because of his magnificent, deep, mellifluous radio announcer's voice, and diction. Although he does not seem to have a strong Zimbabwean accent, it is there, and makes his spoken word that more interesting.

"Good morning, all you Goddamn Indians!" he says it so nicely.

“Hello, Sir Peter.”

“How are you, Mr Peter?”

“Good morning, Sir.”

“W W W Would like y y y you now coffee, SA Peter?” asks Gopal.

“Why would I be heading for my desk with a parched look? You little Indian bastard; of course I want my bloody coffee, now.”

“Yas SA, yas, SA P P P Peter.” Gopal scuttles off to the filthy sink in the corner at the end of the office to organise Peter’s seventh morning upper.

Ashini, who is a Manipuri, one of our drivers and the best type of person, said unsolicited of Gopal once, that he has no bad thoughts of anyone and is entirely trustworthy. This is indeed a compliment in a country and state where poverty and trickery are a way of life. Gopal is a Brahman, the highest caste, but he is content to clean the office, run errands, prepare coffee and tea for the staff, and be good to everyone.

Gopal once invited our entourage to witness his son’s, sacred, Hindu ear-piercing ceremony. At around three years of age, the male Brahman Hindu must have his ear pierced and an earring fitted. Two of us were available to see the Hindu equivalent of circumcision, but in this case, it was a little higher up.

Tim and I took off with Ashini in the Maruti Suzuki Gypsy and braved the motorised melee through the centre of Imphal, the capital of Manipur, and into the southern outskirts. Manipur lurks between Bangladesh, Burma, Nagaland, Assam, Mizoram and Tripura in northeast India. We arrived in relatively sound condition, deafened by

the din from automotive horns and the groaning, far from silent, Gypsy. Gopal greeted us clad in his white Hindu ceremonial nappy and conducted us into his fairly prosperous looking compound. Inside were several houses and a temple complex. Gopal's house was large, cool, and far better than we had expected.

After being greeted ceremonially but kindly by about thirty-five individuals, they conducted us to a darkish room in which were a fan, four chairs, and a table. Within seconds of asking us to sit down, our hosts plied us with beer and whiskey that was followed soon after with a range of Manipuri fare.

Having gorged and eaten ourselves to the brink of destruction, we ambled over to witness the ceremony. Some well-wishers sat whilst others stood and nodded self-consciously at us before looking back to the perpetrators and the victim. Soon it was time. The poor little bugger had been smiling around at everyone when he was mother-handled to the floor. His father, Gopal, held him too. The ringmaster cradled his head in one arm whilst swiftly applying a device that looked like a pair of pliers to the child's ear lobe. I suppose it was like a punch, and punch it did. The child shrieked and kicked, and bawled! Wouldn't you? Bloody hell, having your ear crushed in a pair of pointy pliers can't be fun.

After the child stopped kicking, the ear man tried several times to insert and lock the golden earring. Eventually, having succeeded, he let the child's head go. Dad let his son's body go, mom slipped clear and the little fellow sprang to his feet, swinging punches at anyone within reach.

Well-wishers tut-tutted, poor thinged and ooohhed, but he was inconsolable. He just took swings at anyone silly enough to come near, and made it clear that he was very pissed-off.

As soon as it was polite to do so, we left the group, who would have continued with the celebration for many hours. We knew who was not celebrating.

The man from Zimbabwe throws his tatty, black cloth computer bag onto the floor. Carefully, he steps onto the straps that trail from the bag, out from under the desk, and part the way across the floor. When he picks the bag up again, I thought to myself, he will also pick up whatever he has on the bottom of his shoes. In Imphal where everything can run ankle deep in the streets, this is not a good thing.

He tears a packet of cigarettes and a Chinese lighter from his pocket and turns towards me. "Who the fuck are you? Are you the Australian bastard who's going to organise these Goddamn Indians?" Then he fights with the lighter for a good two minutes, finally cursing, "Fucking Chinese crap!" and flings it out the window.

"Yes. I'm the Australian. Sorry about that." I respond eventually.

"That shit you sent us that you call a plan...you've got a shock coming. Stupid bloody Australian." He then concedes, "At least you fucking Australians know how to say bastard. No-one says baaarstaaard like an Australian!" He doesn't say it properly. Only Australians know the thirty odd permutations of the word barstard and in what context to use each one.

The plan he mentioned was a set of documents requested by the Spanish managing agent's Italian representative

well before I learned where Manipur was, and what was in store for me. It was a wildly optimistic plan conceived in pure ignorance of the environment in which I eventually found myself. Sir Peter brought me back to earth. Sir Peter brought most people back to earth.

Most conversations with Peter are like this. Being Australian, I warmed to him quickly because I recognised the outward bravado, and the underlying warmth and humanness the man possessed. He is a true colonial. Our local staff, the Goddamn Indians, think the sun shines from him. When he foolishly brought his partner to Manipur for a visit after his first break from the project the whole compliment of local staff decamped with all the office vehicles to meet Sir Peter and Mrs Sir Peter at the airport.

The Government of India, you see, with financing through a World Bank loan, is preparing a programme to conduct major maintenance on the Manipur state roads infrastructure. The overall goal, supposedly, is to stimulate economic development. The Bank neddies believe that this will be achieved through these activities on the roads network, and that it will improve the accessibility by the community to government and other services, whilst reducing transportation costs. Good idea!

The preparation work is being done by a rabble put together, somewhat hopefully, as a team by a Spanish company, an English company, and one from New Delhi in India. Whilst the Indian company attempts to steal the project blind, the English stay at home, and keep their upper lips in the correct positions, and the Spanish ignore everyone and take the money.

The Manipur project is a component of a national programme to screw donors for a loan through the World Bank. The central Indian government never really intend to pay the loan back and the Manipur State government is bankrupt and can't. A major project component is the preparation of a feasibility study to determine if investment in the "improvement" and "major maintenance" is justified. An engineering design study put together by Sir Peter has enabled the evaluation of the feasibility for the improvement works. The engineering findings, together with socio-economic findings, helped in identifying the roads that would be included in the project, if it ever happens.

On the good side, the Manipuri Project Director, apart from being long-suffering and a thorough gentleman, is positive about using the fruits of our efforts at some time in the future when, as he says, "All the troubles are over".

The roads in Manipur have deteriorated to a point where many are impassable to all but four-wheel-drive vehicles. Sometimes the roads are impossible to negotiate. This situation has arisen mostly as a result of insufficient and ineffective maintenance and poor and inadequate drainage in the mountainous, shaly countryside. Sir Peter says it is because they are Goddamn Indians.

Once, when we rode with Ashini to the Hotel Imphal for lunch, I asked, "Ashini, why do so many people just walk out in front of cars and walk along the road with their backs to the traffic?"

Ashini said, "They are like cattle." Then he looked at me and then at Sir Peter and said, "They are Goddamn Indians!"

Peter said, "I rest my case."

One thing we do know about the people in whose community we are visitors is that they are happy, hospitable, even in their poor, and difficult conditions. We have never felt less than welcome by the local people.

Sir Peter also dabbles in posing engineering alternatives for roads and pavement designs. His approach focuses on the use of the existing road structures, materials available locally and the capacity of the state to conduct the works with a minimum of capital and recurring expenditures. Unfortunately, the bank neddies think this is a bloody stupid idea and want to spend the money on outside contractors and high technology.

One of the New Delhi-based fruitcakes has decided that the way to fix all the bridges is to replace them with pre-stressed, Hi Tec concrete beam bridges. He also recommends that all the bridges are to have two-lanes. The first downer is that Manipur is subject to frequent earthquakes and concrete bridges like those he recommends have a tendency to leap off their two hundred and fifty millimetre abutments into the raging torrent below. The existing Bailey bridges twist about a bit under tectonic attack but are relatively easy and cheap to repair. Manipur possesses a large stockpile of unused Bailey bridges. The second downer is that there is hardly any traffic in Manipur and two-lane bridges are a waste of money.

Winston Churchill, whom I didn't like but who had some sensible things to say, said, "This is the sort of thing up with which we have to put!"

Sir Peter says, "What do you expect from Goddamn Indians?"

After a particularly disgusting day at work, we decide that it is time to hang one on. It is mid-summer and Indian hot. The flat concrete roof in our office is only one and a half metres above our scones and painted black on top. This ensures that the office becomes super-heated by midday, completely unbearable by one o'clock, and boils our brains by two.

Tim, an Englishman from the south, an honorary colonial, and Computer Assisted Design man, Matt, a pleasant English skinhead surveyor, together with Peter and I, head for Tim's room. Tim has most of the cold booze today. We got into the Tuborg Gold with gusto.

Soon the conversation turns to Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is in turmoil. Farmers are being thrown off their farms, people are being killed, and persecuted. Mr Mugabe, Bob, continues in his sensitive speeches to inflame the situation and blame the British. That's like blaming global warming on crab farts.

Peter works doggedly at the beer and soon has one on. We have learned that Tuborg Gold is a good tongue loosener. It should be with its twelve per cent alcohol content.

Jon Keithson arrives about an hour after we start. That is sort of an anagram for his real name. The personnel in the Indian company part of the project always get his name wrong, so we do too. He always arrives when the grog is free. Often he is carried out when he has finished — all the grog that is. Keithson is a Pom. He doesn't qualify as an Englishman.

One day when Tim accompanied Keithson to his room, he accidentally knocked over a bowl of noodles

onto the carpet. Tim apologised profusely, as one does, but Keithson magnanimously said, “Don’t worry, I’ll pick it up after.”

About a week and a half later, Tim had further cause to enter the Keithson territory. And, there, although now trodden deeply and flat into the carpet, were the noodles! Now we know where the rats are going.

Another episode had Tim and Keithson at a border post between Burma and Manipur. Keithson rushed into the post and demanded immediate access to Burma, saying, “I am British. I want to visit Burma.” He hadn’t thought it necessary to use the preferred title Myanmar. “I represent the World Bank. The British High Commission will vouch for me.”

Tim cringed and the Myanmar officials regarded the ponce with derision. As well-armed officials in uniform gravitated towards Keithson, Tim said, “For Christ’s sake you bloody idiot, you can’t go there anymore. It’s not part of the British Empire any more and isn’t our colony. They don’t want you in their country!” Fortunately Keithson noticed the lack of welcome and withdrew.

“Hey, you Goddamn bastards, I’m gonna tell you a...politically correct story ‘bout what Air Zimbabwe will be like next year.” Pete summoned all his powers of absent sobriety, and began his story.

“The scene is on the plane. ‘Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, this is your Captain, Joseph Chinotimba, welcoming you to Air Jongwe flight 126. We apologise for the four-day delay in taking off due to bad weather, fuel shortage, and the diversion of the scheduled aircraft to collect the honourable President in Malaysia.

It is with great pleasure that I can announce starting this year; nearly fifty per cent of our passengers reached their destination on time. Unfortunately we do have a number of court cases pending, but if you are disgruntled at the delay in this flight, our steward, Biggie, will be happy to brief you on our out-of-court settlement policies.

To make your journey pleasant and memorable, we serve complimentary tea, no British tea, strictly Tanganda, and Lobels bread. For our non-European passengers we are the only Airline who can help you find out how bad the British are. They brought into our country; farm invasions, diesel shortages, AIDS, budget deficits, inflation, and they took away our army to the Congo. And then they tried to invade the country under the disguise of a solar eclipse.

We regret that there is no in-flight movie, as we did not record it from the TV station JBC because there was no movie broadcast this week. For those who do not want to watch our movie, there is some enlightening literature in the seat pocket in front of you, such as *The Idiot's Guide to Farm Invasion*. There are life jackets under your seats and free bathing costumes are available to the Aunties and free bathing trunks for the Uncles for emergency landings in water. There is no smoking in this aircraft. Any smoke you may see in the cabin is only the early warning system of the engines telling us to slow down and you do not need to panic.

For take off, kindly be seated, place your seat in the upright position, and fasten your seat belt. For those who do not have a seat, kindly fasten your own belt to the arm of someone else's seat.

We hope you will enjoy your trip with us, especially when we fly as close as possible to the ground for the best view of the farms that are still available for settlement.”

“Shit!” I said, “Sounds just like the airline I came on to get here!”

We get into talk of the civil war in Zimbabwe about the time Keithson arrives but the drunken subject changes for the time being. Peter wants to tell stories, any stories. Apparently, when a Zimbo has a skinful and feels homesick, he thinks about Harare and watering holes.

“And I tell you, you God forsaken lot of individ.....indif..... induve.....Fuck!.....youbastards.....” This is spoken as one word. “There’s no better place to find our dying breed of the human species than at Caribbea Bay round bar, the Harare Sports Club, or at Castle Corner. Of course, it’s even better if it coincides with a one-day international cricket match. Zimbos can be found by cocking an ear at the cricket ground where you will hear hoo-hoo-hoo-hooooooo taaa”.

We pour out more beer and abuse Tim for not having more plain salted potato chips. He insists on buying those chintzy flavoured things – chilly, sour cream, vinegar, and barbecue – and he’s English!

“Useless bloody Englishman!” says Matt who, as I said, is English.

“All of these creatures are unable to make conversation with passing girls because they’re drunk. All their mates are watching, and they know she’s ugly.” Sir Peter goes on. “They resort to the curious mating call, which done in stereo can be quite seductive.” He demonstrates again the call of the Zimbabwean trotting duck.

“hoo-hoo-hoo-hoooooooootaaa”.

“It causes considerable embarrassment to pretty girls, but delights the plain ones and makes them feel vaguely attractive to the callers, even though they are drunk and even more ugly. A really plain, fat girl, will bring out the best or, is it the worst, in the grand stand.” Peter takes a big pull on his beer, forgetting the cigarette that dangles from his bottom lip. Smoke and bubbles catch his breath and he wheezes and coughs for some time, eventually subsiding into dribbling and sibilant chuckles. Having recovered, he continues with the story.

“However, should you miss these chaps they can be found easily on the street during day light hours. They normally are dressed in fellies, a local type of boot that must be disgustingly dirty and well worn. No Zimbo is caught dead in a new or clean pair of fellies because that would prove they are pooftas. Dunno who breaks ‘em in for ‘em. They’re good to drink beer out of when they can’t be used for feet anymore. They also c’n be fashioned into hats to be worn with great pride at cricket matches and around bars.”

I am beginning to understand Sir Peter’s mode of dress.

“Socks and guds are only to be worn on very special occasions.”

“What are guds?” Tim asks.

“What are guds? Underpants, of course!” Peter replies shortly. He then continues, “And if the socks are worn they must never be pulled up. Boxer shorts are obligatory and must be black, the smaller the better, to display what the wearer thinks are muscular thighs. To comply with

the dress code the t-shirt must have obscenities screen-printed badly all over it. An alternative to the t-shirt is a khaki shirt with a box of maddogs in one sleeve.”

I ask, “Maddogs?”

“Geez! Cigarettes!” He sighs, looks at us as if we are cretins, and says, “As I was saying, the buttons must be undone half the way down to display the hairless chest. A scruffy three-day growth provides that just-in-from-the-bush look. The Zimbo in uniform will probably be gnawing on a piece of tong — which is biltong to you lot. He will tell you he shot it with his Boet’s 458 rifle, made it himself, and that it was a kudu, eland or an impi. Shit! I mean impala. All this happened down in Kezi when he was on an anti-poaching stint for humanity.”

He’s in full swing now but draws breath for simultaneous pulls on his Tuborg and fag. Then he says, “Ask what he did over the long weekend, he’ll reply, Ya well, me and my mate Rob took the old man’s boat up to Kariba where we checked Bruce, Rover, Mark, John and a whole lot of chicks — whose names aren’t important. Kariba is on the road to Zambia beyond the Zambesi River from Harare and before Mana Pools. God I wish I were there! We just jawled around the lake and got pissed out of our brains at the round bar. Hey, one bloke was giving Dave’s chick gradient so he gave him a few tokens and tuned him to press on’.” He guffawed at the memory. We only half understood what he had said.

“Rob was so faced he cotched down the side of some bloke’s bakkie and you should have seen John goating by the pool. Then Mark hukked this mahobo’s hat and jeezlike!” We found out later that a mahobo is a security guard.

“The chicks all got gortched.” Because again we did not understand the lingo, he grimaced and said, “Sun burnt! All right now? Can I go on?” We, all except Keithson, nodded.

“But one wasn’t chuft because she’d had too much bennies, that’s sun. Shit! It’s like interpreting at the UN. And is now like a roooi neck. And a roooi neck is a bloody gortched pommie. But nevermindthat.” This too was spoken as one word.

“Are you coming to the beerfest tonight — it should be a bender. Agg, I’ll check you around later on. Cheers.....” Peter acquires a conspiratorial look on his loosening face and confides, “The beerfest I could talk about for ever. They sing a song that goes something like this:” He takes a deep breath and hisses:

“we’re zimbo’s, we’re zimbo’s, we’re right at home,
we drink when we’re thirsty, we drink when
we’re dry,
and if you don’t like us, just f’ off and die.”

In our well-watered state, we think that very funny and spit beer all over each other for several minutes.

Although we aren’t staying at Fawlty Towers we really shouldn’t mention the war.

“Were you in the civil war Pete?” I ask.

His answer is not immediate. He goes quiet for a while. Then, having thought through whatever it is that causes his whole being perceptibly to deflate, he says, “Yeah, I was in the war.” Too quiet. Too full of air. Too serious.

There is a lull in the conversation and Keithson slides off his chair and spills his beer and the remaining potato chips onto Tim’s carpet.

Tim says, "Fuck off Keithson! For fuck's sake y' bleeding prick!"

Keithson replies, "It's alright for you, you're young." He often is in a different conversation, so as always we ignore him and tell him, collectively this time to, "Fuck off!"

Peter says, "I was in the Engineering Corps and didn't have to go into the bad areas at first. Much of the time we played sport, drank beer and chased anything that had a space between its legs." He pauses, sucks his cigarette, sighs, and says, "Once I had to go out with a platoon to check on a road. Soon after we got there, we found ourselves facing off a hostage situation. Some of the rebels had taken some local people hostage and were threatening to kill them if we didn't piss off."

Keithson rolls onto his back and snores loudly. Matt pushes him onto his side with his work boot and says, "Fucking pratt!" Keithson continues sleeping but stops snoring.

"There was a lot of shouting to and from and eventually the reb's came out using the hostages as shields. One of the hostages was a beautiful young black woman about eighteen years old. The reb' bastard had torn most of her blouse off and held her viciously by a breast with one hand and pointed his weapon at us with the other. The other hostages were held similarly."

Silence! No one says anything.

Peter's voice takes on a kind of quiet desperation as says, "I thought shit, these buggers are gonna have us and we're gonna die. For some reason, we must all have felt the same. We just opened up on them all with our automatic weapons. We cut the poor hostage bastards to pieces along with their captors."

Silence!

"I mean they were all just standing there one moment alive and then we killed them. They weren't alive anymore."

Silence!

"Shit...you know...it's funny...no, it's not funny... Fuck! You know what I mean! They were alive and then they were dead. There were all sorts of bits and pieces that used to be attached to them all over the place. That beautiful girl was almost cut in two. Her brains were congealing on the ground next to what was left of her head. It didn't matter that she was black. She was a person; a beautiful one, and she didn't deserve to die with those bastards. Not then, not for a long time."

Silence!

"You never think about what it means to kill people until you've actually done it. We had to pick up all the bits and throw them down a well. The next day it really started to stink... and...Shit! You just don't think about that. Yesterday they were alive. I mean she.....them... ..talking, breathing.....you know.....and now they're rotting.....stinking at the bottom of a well." Tears wander down the craggy recesses of his patrician's face and he looks at the floor. He has finished his cigarette and ground the butt into Tim's carpet. His beer too is finished and the bottle lies on the lounge, the last drops of moisture leak onto the fabric, as if it too is waiting to be flung into a well.

"You never fucking think about it and then all of a sudden they're dead and smashed and you're throwing them into a well. Fuck!"

“I’m going to bed. I’ve had enough beer,” I say, and leave.

Tim and Matt carry Peter and Keithson back to their respective rooms and pour them into their beds.

I think to myself, as I lie in the dark, I haven’t any choice because the power is out again, that this man obviously feels very badly about those deaths in a war that lasted for years and resulted in the loss of many innocent lives. The same man who now feels lost without his daughter who remains in Zimbabwe, calls people God-damn Indians and spends hours with his counterparts, patiently helping them with their work and treating them as friends and fellow human beings.

It also is the man who commissioned the fabrication of a galvanised bathtub by an Imphal tinker because civilised people take baths. They do not have showers! The first model was somewhat like a coffin and too short for his long frame. He sold it to me and had a bigger one made. He told me that the smaller one was, “Good enough for a rude Australian bastard.”

The next day, apart from the hangovers, is normal. The cows still poop in the streets. The water in the hotel stops flowing just as I have soaped up and am ready to wash off. I scream, “Arseholes!” It doesn’t make the water flow but it makes me feel better.

Breakfast is on time. The old bull still lies sleeping just next to the median strip at the intersection near to our office, his balls lying dangerously close to the traffic. The Stop sign still has not been replaced since the military parked their armoured vehicle long ways upon the median strip with the wheels off the ground. The rubbish

still collects in the streets and people burn big piles of plastic bags because they can. People eat, defecate, sing, procreate, cheat, lie, make friends, and die. The traffic honks, clatters, and seemingly goes nowhere. The water carriers collect their fetid brew from the public pond and cart it off to the hotels and restaurants complete with our good friends *e coli* and *amoeba*. We walk to work past the United Toilet Complex, where the food sellers store their vegetables and mothers help their little sons to pee on the footpath. We pass the militia fellows dressed in their jungle fatigues and sand shoes, as they unthinkingly point their automatic weapons at passers-by.

At the office, the team leader's computer rings, beeps, bangs and squawks with violence from a computer game. He squirms with concentration in his seat, and yells, "Pill-lock!" as the machine gets the better of him. We quietly get on with the job.

When the man from Zimbabwe arrives, the staff, again treat him like royalty. Today though he is a bit quiet, doesn't call anyone anything, and doesn't say fuck or God-damn at all.

At last, he turns to me and says, "Four guys are driving across London, one from England, one from America, one from India, and the other one is from Zimbabwe. A bit down the road, the man from India starts to pull rice from his bag and throw it out the window. The man from America turns to him and asks, "What the hell are you doing?"

"The man from India says, "We have so much rice in India, I'm sick of looking at it!"

"A few kilometres down the road, the man from America begins pulling cobs of corn from his bag and throwing

them out the window. The man from India asks, “Why are you doing that?”

“The American replies, “Man, we have so many of these damned things in America I’m sick of looking at them!”

“Inspired by the others, the man from England opens the car door and pushes the Zimbabwean out.”

Peter says, “Even the best of us feels a bit vulnerable sometimes, a bit down. I’m beginning to wonder what’s going to happen to us back at home.....It’s a beautiful place.....Zimbabwe.....it’s my place.....and I was born there.”