

Monday, 9 January 2023

How I got to Africa and worked there

I arrived in Mozambique in 2000 and worked there for nearly three years. It happened in a most odd way. I was working, most contentedly, in the Media Section of The University of the South Pacific (USP) in Suva, Fiji. I had a big audio studio, like a broadcast studio. My local colleague, Maraia, was bright and we worked well. She was assertive but not when not talking with the USP academics, both local and expatriates, who threw their weight around and were aggressive and pompous. I had no issues with that. It's a norm with academics. But for her it was hard to deal with.

The academics required media to support them in their teaching. Most of the lecturers I met had grand illusions of recording a 45 minutes written lecture reading from their notes. It was awful to hear.

I did what they wished. Many of them read with a high level of acquired speech boredom, and others stumbled through their notes. They wanted to hear their lecture before it was used in lectures. Then they wanted to re-record. Shit. I got frustrated. It seemed obvious to me that lecturers knew their topics and that the best way to use audio with it was for me to get them to talk in audio interviews. If visuals were required they could make Power Point programs where a graphic was seen on a TV screen and the lecturer commented on it and its content. I did that. It worked well. Lecturers chatted easily about content. I asked questions and the results were human like recordings. We also made Powerpoint programs with the staff, showing plants, animals and mathematical diagrams.

In 2000, the USP crashed and stopped working. There was a coup with the Prime Minister and govt being overthrown and a man called Speight took over the country. He was corrupt. There was a crisis. India students stayed home, Fiji students did the same and students from foreign countries went back to their countries. The USP was empty.

Then the electricity came off and on. The plumbing began to malfunction and there were riots in town. Expatriate lecturers left the country. It was a bleak time. Three months later I applied for a job I saw on the Internet. It was in Mozambique. A week later I got a phone call from the UK asking if I will come for an interview in the UK in Manchester. My fare to be paid. So, Yes, I took off to the UK. The interview was ridiculous. It lasted about ten minutes and I then had the job for three years to set up an adult radio education program in Quelimane to be broadcast throughout the province of Zambezia, which was huge. My topics were health, education and agriculture.

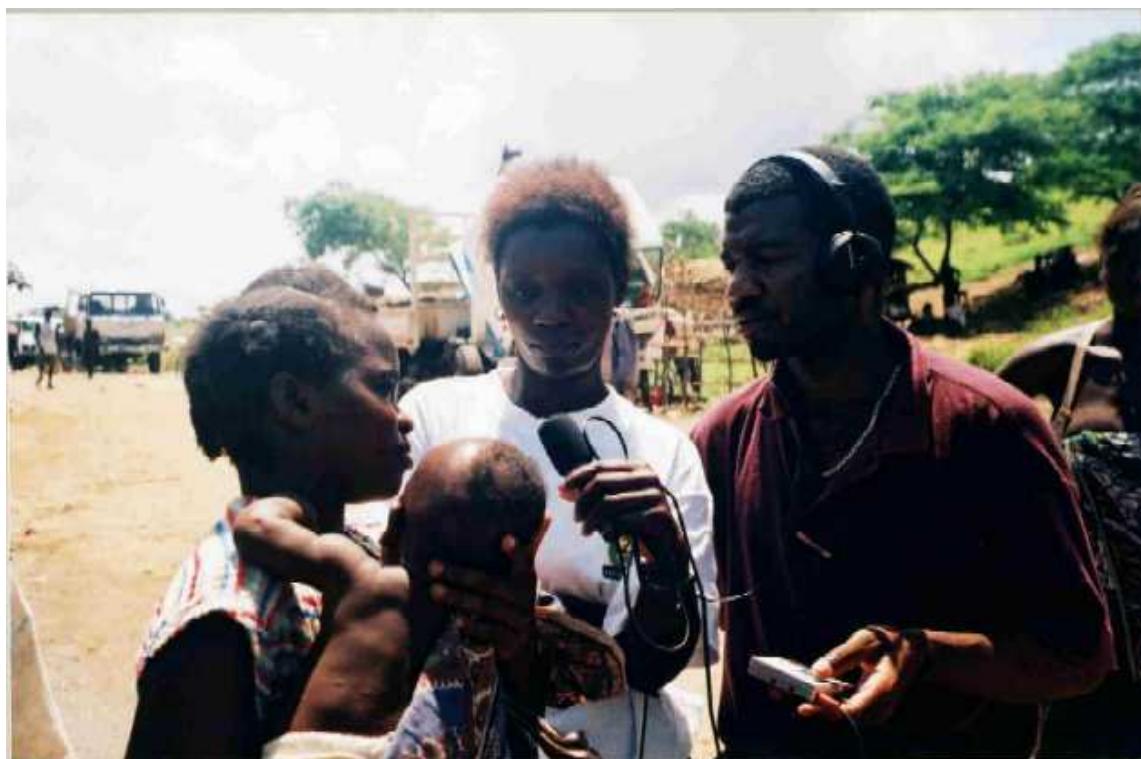
My only research was a document the people of the NGO employment has made. It was thin in content and two years old. I gathered that World Vision had got the contract, did not know how to implement it and farmed it out to a company in the UK who worked from the UK and Kenya. I was to work through World Vision (WV), although I had total control of the radio project.

Peggy and I flew to Maputo and went directly to WV. They seemed hostile and the Director did not want to see me, but we waited and then eventually we met her. I did not see why she was hostile, but there it was. We got to Quelimane and other shocks began.

I was given a new Land Rover with a four wheel driver and Radio M painted on it. I went to the radio station. They knew nothing about my arrival.

The WV boss was an expatriate. He was good and briefed me as he had set up the project. But, but I was not WV staff. I was my own boss reporting to London. So, I began.

I went back to the radio station and there was to be a new manager. However, I had to deal with the one on his way out. He was good value and I said I needed local staff to help me. I was introduced to two people, Kim and Olinda who I found out had both been sidelined at work because they were stroppy individuals. I said, I would like to work with them. A good choice. They were bright, stroppy, but full of self-confidence and between them they spoke some English and the two main local languages of Zambezia plus Portuguese. So they were the start of my team. Kim was married to a Muslim. Olinda was a solo Mum with two small girls and a son.



I asked the couple if they had ever been outside the studio to record. Neither had, yet they had both worked in radio for several years. So Peggy, Kim, Olinda and I took off with my tape recorder and microphones and drove to a village on the Zambezi River. It was exciting all round. The village met people from Quelimane and we talked with them informally and then on audio tape. Years later I put the village into a film script.

So to cut a long story short. Kim and Olinda became good friends with Peggy and I, and between us after the three years we had over 150 radio drama programs made and we



were reaching more than two thirds of the population according to radio research. We broadcast around 5 am in the morning as people were at home and after dark in the evenings when they also at home. We had a story line in the drama set in a fictitious village with a drunken farmer, a school teacher who chased good looking women, an agriculturalist who came to the village on a motorbike and a nurse who ran a medical clinic.

We recorded all the radio dramas outside in villages using a portable recorder and making the sound effects from real items and animal - a motorbike, chickens etc.

Kim, Olinda and I have stayed in touch all the years since we came home to NZ. I also wrote this story for their children.

The Moon

Kim and Olinda were both small children who lived in the same village in Africa. One day their mothers said that they were going to live somewhere else. The two friends were happy until they found out that they would be going to live in different villages.

On the day they left for their new homes they both cried. Kim went towards the mountains of the East. Olinda went with her mother and father to the big mountains of the West.

When he got to the new village Kim found there were mountains all around him. On the first night in the new village Kim was frightened as he heard strange noises. They seemed to come from inside his room and outside his house. He knew they were strange wild animals.

When Olinda arrived at her new house, she too saw that high mountains surrounded her village. That night when she went to bed, she hid under the sheet and wondered if the animals of the night were going to come and take her away. Her mother said it was nothing to worry about. But Olinda knew her mother was wrong.

After the first day in the new house, a friend call Patricky came to see Kim's mother. She told him Kim was frightened, and how he saw monsters and wild animals at night. Patricky said he would talk with Kim.

That evening after dinner Patricky and Kim sat outside the house until the moon began to rise.

"Look" said Patricky "the moon is rising slowly. It climbs up the side of the mountain. When it gets to the top, it floats up in the sky and begin its long journey."

Kim watched the moon go up the side of the tall mountain. Before the moon got to the top of the mountain he began to feel tired. Patricky took him in his arms and carried him inside the house.

"Tonight," he said, "when you go to sleep the moon will look after you as it crosses the sky. When it sees any strange animal it will chase it away."

Patricky carried Kim to his bed

"In the morning if you wake up early", murmured Patricky "You will just be in time to see the moon. It will land on top of the other mountain and then crawl down the side. When it gets near the bottom of the mountain, the sun comes up and you will be happy and safe".

Kim slept all night and in his dream he watched the moon telling the wild animals to go away.

Next day Patricky came to the house again. Kim was excited and told him how the moon had guarded him all night and made his house safe from wild animals.

Kim asked Patricky if the moon would help his friend Olinda who lived in another village. Kim said that Olinda would be scared of the wild night animals.

Patricky whispered some words into his ears. Kim smiled and then said quietly

‘I will do that’.

Later that evening after Patricky had gone, Kim sat outside his house and watched the moon rise to begin its slow walk up to the top of the mountain.

He stood up and shouted to the moon.

“Moon, last night you looked after me. Tonight I want you to go and look after my friend Olinda. She is frightened of the night animals”.

That night Kim had a dream. He saw the moon scaring all the wild night animals from Olinda’s house.

When Kim awoke, it was early and still dark. He looked out of his bedroom window and saw the moon just as it was landing on the top of the other mountain.

He wanted to ask the moon if it had looked after his friend so he called out;

“Did you scare the animals away from my friend, Olinda?”

Kim stood looking the moon for a long time as it climbed down the mountainside. As it got to the bottom, Kim felt a wind coming from the mountain. It brushed over his face, over his hair and into his ear and he heard the word ‘Yes’.

Note: I was called by Kim and Olinda as “Patricky”