

Taste of Peace on Vacation Leads Couple to Quit Rhodesia

SALISBURY, Zimbabwe-Rhodesia,
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Irene and Stuart Clark at their home in Salisbury, Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. They have disposed of most of their furniture as they prepare to emigrate to Australia. At least a thousand whites a month are leaving the troubled country.

Irene and Stuart Clark are “taking the gap.” Like many white Rhodesians and most of their closest friends, the Clarks, who are in their early 20's, are turning their backs on Zimbabwe-Rhodesia and the war they feel is closing in on them. In two weeks they will fly to Perth, Australia, and a life they are convinced must hold more promise.

Each month on the average more than a thousand whites officially “take the gap” — a rugby term for the maneuver in which a ball carrier darts through an opening in the opposition's line of defense. In addition to the whites officially pulling out, each month perhaps a couple of hundred simply fail to return from vacations abroad and are therefore not included in Government statistics.

“Mainly it's the call-ups,” Mr. Clark said in an interview in the couple's living room, bare now except for a lamp, a chair, a cat and a carpet. He was referring to the reserve police antiterrorist duty that takes him away from his home, his wife and his

job for three weeks in every eight. "At this stage in my life," the 23-year-old asbestos-products salesman continued, "I want to study at night. I can't do that here. If I want to make anything of my life, I've got to go."

Mrs. Clark, a secretary for a film-distribution company, squeezed her hands together nervously. "I feel like a complete prisoner here now," she said. "I don't like to drive at night. With planes being shot down, I don't want to fly. Most of our friends have left the country. If we're to live a normal life again, if I'm to see my husband again, it's worth it to leave."

Inception of the Idea

Although born in what is now Malawi, Mr. Clark has lived in Rhodesia for 10 years. Mrs. Clark was born in Egypt of Greek parents but has lived here 19 of her 20 years. They say they first began to think of leaving when Mrs. Clark's cousin and a close friend of Mr. Clark were both killed in the same guerrilla ambush several months before their marriage two years ago.

Mr. Clark, who completed a year of active military duty in 1975 and was called up for 10 more months the next year, recalled that in those days most skirmishes with guerrillas of the Patriotic Front took place in border areas more than a hundred miles from Salisbury. "Now they're fighting just outside the city limits," he said. "A lot of people don't realize the war is on our doorstep. They don't want to know what's happening."

The couple's determination to leave has grown as Mr. Clark's tours of reserve duty have become longer and more frequent. But the catalyst was a vacation in South Africa in March, their first trip outside the country in years.

"Only then," Mrs. Clark recalled, "did I realize how restricted we are. In South Africa we could drive anywhere we wanted to go, there were no weapons everywhere. You could even drive at night. I was just tickled pink about it. I couldn't believe it. I just felt free."

Brother Is in Australia

For a while, the couple planned to emigrate to South Africa. But a subsequent trip to look for employment ended that idea. "When they found out I was Rhodesian," Mr. Clark said, "nobody wanted to hear my story."

Euphoric letters the couple began to receive from Mr. Clark's brother, who went to Australia six months ago, started them thinking about moving to Perth.

"He's very happy there," Mrs. Clark said. "He says if you're young and prepared to work hard, there's plenty of scope for advancing." Mr. Clark's brother is a printer and has found him a job as a salesman for a chemical concern.

The Clarks say reaction to their decision has been mostly favorable. Although a few friends insisted the couple would soon return to Zimbabwe Rhodesia, most just said they didn't blame them for leaving.

‘Chicken Run’ and ‘Owl Run’

“A couple of years ago,” Mr. Clark recalled, “you would have *been* called yellow or a sniveler. Now it's, ‘Good luck to you.’ “ Reflecting the change of attitude, the route out of the country used to be known as the “chicken run.” Today, it's called the wise “owl run.”

They have been supported by friends and family, and the parents of both the

Clarks plan to leave within the year. But the Government bureaucracy has worn the couple down. They have obtained a tax clearance and clearance from the bank, but Mr. Clark says his police reserve unit is “still chasing me at the moment.” Last week he received a registered letter listing his call-up dates for the rest of the year, a missive he has ignored, confident it is a mistake.

But the Clarks cannot ignore the regulation limiting the amount of money they can take with them to about \$800. That is the difference between the \$1,350 emigrating couples are normally allowed to take and the amount they spent on their South African vacation, a deduction they feel is unreasonable.

Because of the currency restriction, they will give most of their \$3,000 nest egg to their parents.

“This Government has a talent for making enemies of its few friends,” Mr. Clark said. “I've been hanging on here not to make a fortune but because I like the country and the people. It's as if they want to chase us away.”

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