

[New] Bruce Dewar – my adventures after Northview

As I reflect on the half century that has passed since the “Northview days”, I am left with an overwhelming sense of amazement. Over 50 years have flown by so fast, and yet they have been filled with an abundance of unpredictable experiences and adventures.

As was the order of the day, I completed my compulsory military service in my first year after Matric. While this experience was not an adventure of choice, it did bring some dubious advantages, not the least of which are my laundering skills, and I have long held the role of master-launderer and ironing expert in our family.

The next stage of my life brought a wide range of far more exciting adventures which I remember fondly.



My years at Wits left me with a sense of amazement and respect for the expertise and range of vision of the professors in the Chemical Engineering Department. These student days were the times of protests against the government, and of studying late into the night. They were also the early days of computers. The new “mainframe” computer in the Mechanical Engineering building was a wonder of the mid-sixties. While we now laugh at the awkward and cumbersome attributes of this innovation, which was the size of a small house, I remain indebted to that old monolith, the forerunner of our PC’s. It brought my first realization of the potential of computers but also brought me the love of my life; an education student in the Arts Faculty who I would probably otherwise never have met. It seems that the programmers of this behemoth were ahead of the times when they instituted the side-line gimmick of a computer-dating program. Jannean was my computer-date. We met in 1966 and were married in December 1970. So I now had a soul-mate and an MSc degree in Chemical Engineering.

Within months of our wedding I embarked on a new adventure when I was sent to England by De Beers to oversee contract research at the UK Atomic Energy Research Centre in Harwell (close to Oxford). This was a very exciting albeit somewhat intimidating experience, as most of my colleagues were honours graduates from Oxford or Cambridge Universities! My research at De Beers involved developing a unique method for bonding metal to industrial diamonds providing them with a variety of industrial uses (eg dentist drill bits) and I’ve been informed that this technique is still used today. Our sojourn in the UK provided Jannean and me with the opportunity to explore the British Isles extensively from the whisky producing Highlands to Land’s End. We also spent time in the intriguing world of diamond buying and industrial diamond trading. Our trip back to Africa provided us with another few months of adventure as we explored many of the highlights of Europe using the renowned guide book, “Europe on 5 Dollars a Day”. What unforgettable experiences that brought!

1973 saw the start of new adventures when I joined Anglo American Research to work on new process and equipment development. This work required that I travelled extensively in Africa including in Zambia, Rhodesia, Angola, Mozambique, and the Congo, to improve metal extraction processes. On the home front, our lives were filled with totally unforeseen experiences and adventures when Jannean and I were blessed with a set of identical twin

daughters in 1974. Just three years later we were surprised by a set of twin boys. Was that mainframe computer in evidence again!

In 1977 we moved to Rustenburg, and for the next 10 years our young family enjoyed the wonderful freedom of life on the Rustenburg Platinum Mine with its extensive social club facilities, and a wide range of sports activities including horseback riding, swimming and tennis. Our children have fond memories of their school days at the proudly multiracial Selly Park Convent School, where Jannean also taught. Initially, I devoted my time as Research and Development Manager of the base metal refinery. An exciting achievement was the development of the extraction process to separate cobalt and nickel. In 1979 as Metallurgical Project Manager I was responsible for designing a new base metal refinery, and in 1983 I became General Manager of this world -class operation. These were hectic years which involved developing a state of the art security system, nerve racking deadlines, and complex union negotiations, but what intriguing experiences they were, and how fast that decade flew by.

In 1987 I was recruited by Sherritt Gordon in western Canada as a Consulting Engineer responsible for potential projects associated with the extraction of nickel, copper, and cobalt. These projects led to the construction of refineries in Africa, Australia, and Europe, and once again led to extensive travel. Our move from the southern hemisphere to the Canadian prairies was quite an experience for us all, as the temperatures of Rustenburg (which could reach over 40°C) were at times replaced by the extreme winter temperatures of Alberta (sometimes as low as -40°C feeling like -50°C with the wind chill). The family adapted extremely well, and ice-skating, ice-hockey, skiing, and ice climbing became the sports of choice. Believe it or not, Jannean prefers the Canadian winter to the Highveld winter, as thick coats, insulated boots, and central heating mean that one never really needs to feel cold.

Canadian schools provided another new adventure for the family. Jannean soon obtained her Alberta Teacher's Certification and subsequently devoted the next 15 years to various teaching roles. Our children, then 10 and 13 year olds, were immediately delighted with some new-found freedoms and money-earning opportunities such as: a 5am paper route, and numerous baby-sitting assignments. All four of them went on to qualify as Chemical Engineers and have progressed to various management and executive roles in oil and gas production. Three of them have married Chemical Engineers, so the discussions around the dinner table can become somewhat intense, at times. They all live in Canada.

In 1993 I entered the world of new product development and developed and commercialised new products required by industry. At this stage I spent considerable time travelling through Japan, South Korea, and China as this is where the major markets are.

1997 brought new adventures when I accepted the position of Managing Director and CEO of a Belgian-owned company which produced high tech products such as materials for rechargeable batteries and for the electronics industry. I managed the company until 2008, after which I retired and established my own consultancy, helping start-up companies to commercialise new products. Today most of the work I do is pro-bono.

We are grateful for good health and remain very active, but travel has become more leisurely now. The Hawaiian Islands provide a beautiful and tranquil vacation spot for the whole

family, and we usually gather there in the spring. Jannean and I love to explore unusual locations, but the \$5.00 a day experiences are long past. We have now become avid cruisers which provides us with the adventures of exploring exotic locales and also of enjoying the comfort of the ships' facilities. Our trips have included visits to Russia, Alaska, the Panama Canal, an expedition around Cape Horn, South America, "the End of the World", and through the Straits of Magellan. Amongst others, in the near future we are planning a trip which will include a visit to Machu Picchu the ancient Peruvian ruins.

During the school term, we spend most of the week with some of our nine grandchildren in the city of Calgary where we provide back-up to their very busy parents. Our home is in the Rocky Mountain town of Canmore which is on the edge of the renowned Banff National Park and about one hour's drive from Calgary. We are surrounded by spectacular mountain scenery and ancient forests. We love our mountain retreat. This area is a great attraction for family and friends. It is a favourite outdoor winter and summer playground. Yes we do have an annual summer, and the temperature sometimes reaches +30°C. Our spectacular golf courses attract tourists from far and wide. Family members regularly participate in mountain biking, road racing, and hiking.

I am astonished at how rapidly the years have flown by. I am grateful for the joys of family and of friendships made over the years, and I am wiser for the range of adventures and experiences I have had. I have very fond memories of my "Northview days", and have often wondered what happened to classmates and teachers. What a wonderful surprise to now have the opportunity to renew contact with friends after so many years.

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