

## MEMORIES OF MEPS AND MOMBASA

### Chris Chaney (Chris “Henry” Czyzewski)

I was born in Nairobi in 1944 and my parents moved to Mombasa in 1949.

We settled in Likoni in a house that faced the harbour entrance, near the cable warning sign. It was a great place to grow up among tracts of wild bush and neighbours far away enough as not to worry you. There was a small beach nearby and at low tide you could walk out to the reef for some considerable distance. Near the cable warning sign was a set of steps that were a great spot to fish.

My sister Suzanna was enrolled at the Loreto Convent. As I was only 5, the nuns agreed to take me in. I believe I was the only boy in the convent at the time. As soon as I was 6, I was sent off to the primary school. I am not sure if the nuns had had enough of me or my father felt that being in the company of girls was bad for me?!

I loved the MEPS. I made friends with a load of boys and these friendships remain in the mind to this day. The Jupp brothers, Chris Wylie, David Nugent, David Hoskins, Chris Jolly, Mike McFarnell to name a few, and last but not least, Shaun Metcalfe. When the Metcalfe's arrived on the scene in 1954, Shaun became my 'best mate'. The Metcalfe's were my second family and Kit Metcalfe was a true guardian and second father to me a few years later. That we are still friends all these years later is a wonderful thing.

The MEPS activities made for a lot of fun. I remember we had Dinky car models of racing cars of the day which were 'tinkered' with by adding lead weight to them. These were then towed behind racing boys down and round the corridors. Marbles or 'nyabs' were a big thing and if you could get a couple of big 'steelies', you had it made! The 'limies' had conkers; we had 'nyabs'.

Cubs was a great escape, except that we catholic boys had to get special permits from Father McInnes to be allowed to go to the heathen sanctuary run by the Reverend Jupp! We gravitated to the Florida to swim and cavort. We peddled our bikes to Nyali swimming club (Mombasa Swimming Club, English Point). On my side of the south mainland, we had Shelly Beach to enjoy and the freedom to explore the reefs.

School holidays were never boring or dull. We 'goggled', swam, cycled and whenever the opportunity arose went sea fishing from Kempton's boat yard. I believe that we played for 12 hours a day and slept for the other 12. No electronic gadgets, fast food or other modern attractions. We earned our cents to go to the cinema. The Regal, Queens and the Naaz. Here we watched cowboys slaughter Indians and watch as John Wayne and Roy Rogers single handedly won the Second World War. The 'pushie' became a spitfire, hurricane or other some such war beast. We took on imaginary personas and also set about banishing all the bad guys to eternity.

As puberty approached, some blokes were approached quicker than the rest. What envy when the proudly showed off a whisker or chest hair! Girls suddenly not only became pains, but also an object of scrutiny when no one was looking!

All too soon, we started to grow up. It was time to move on to the 'big' schools up country. The Prince of Wales, Duke of York or St Mary's in Nairobi were the main options. Some were sent off to Britain to continue their schooling.

I have often been asked what it was like growing up in the Tropics. All I can say is that it was wonderful!

What a near perfect childhood we had. Sure we were part of a privileged society, with access to much more than the average Kenyan had. But we had no hatred or animosity towards the locals. We were taught to behave properly and respectfully. We all had good relations with the houseboy, shamba boy and especially the m'pishi! We were free to pretty much go anywhere and do anything we wanted to. We knew the limits and how far we could push the boundaries.

I was particularly lucky in that I acquired a second family who gave me love and comfort when I needed it most. I am lucky, as I still have that second family. Perhaps not as close as were once were, but the bond will never be broken.

I look back and say thank god that my parents chose Mombasa and for what that old place gave me. My last visit to Mombasa was when I was working with British India in 1963.

I haven't been back since as I don't want to shatter what is perhaps an illusion of an idyll that is my memory of the Mombasa of my childhood.

PS I changed my name by Deed Poll in 1968 from Czyzewski to Chaney. I was past telling people how to spell the name and pronounce it. Henry was my first name but was only ever used at MEPS, by the Metcalfe's and by authority! I am Chris!



1961- Mombasa.

Chris Chaney, Shaun Metcalfe and Kit Metcalfe