

The longest day of my life

Dorothy and I decided to take a holiday in the Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean. We planned it with Margaret and John who were working in Nairobi and consequently all four of us and Vanessa (just 2 years old) and Max (about 8 months old) found ourselves holidaying on the island of Mahé, the principal island of the Seychelles archipelago, in 1970. This provided John and Margaret with the opportunity to visit the nearby island of Pralin to see two rare natural history species – the black parrot and the *coco de mer* (a large double coconut which is black and resembles a human's bottom and which floats in the sea; hence its name).

Dorothy and I rashly said we would look after the children one day; so that morning Margaret and John set out on motor boat-cum-ferry (and were soon seasick) while Dorothy and I set about entertaining the children. This proved to be not too difficult. Vanessa wrapped her legs round me and clung on, and Max did the same with Dorothy; and we went immediately to the hotel kitchen garden area to see the hotel's chickens. Here Vanessa, who had recently learnt to greet people in French with "Bonjo", a rendering of *bon jour*, hailed every hotel employee we met. They were charmed of course and made a fuss of the youngsters, who in turn were charmed at the praise. So as soon as we had left the employees Vanessa wanted to return to the hotel kitchen garden for more spoiling. So until lunchtime we carried on with this exhausting pastime.

After lunch it resumed until it was time for a swim. This proved to be almost as taxing as visiting the chickens in the kitchen garden. There was a slide in the deeper end of the children's pool and Vanessa was not going to miss being spoilt by Grandad and Granny so she went to the top of the slide and refused to slide down unless Granny stood at the foot of the slide to catch her. Granny had never been a swimmer and could only catch Vanessa if I stood behind her to catch both of them. Several hours (or was it years?) later Margaret and John returned still seasick but clutching a *coco de mer*.

Dorothy and I returned gratefully to our own hotel to sleep the sleep of the gratefully contented.