

EARLY MORNING TEA-ANYONE?

By Ex Missionary, Paul M. Riley

Visitors to former British Commonwealth Countries were often surprised at the local tradition of being served Early Morning Tea while they were still in their bed. The fancier hotels almost always asked Americans what time they wanted their tea in the morning. Americans usually declined the offer. Those who were not warned would often scream when their hotel room door was suddenly unlocked while they were sleeping, then the light would be switched on and in would shuffle a barefoot young man clad in white shorts and a short sleeved tunic jacket. The edges of the uniform would be trimmed with red braid, the trademark of houseboys and kitchen helpers. The man would place the tea tray, he was carrying, on a stand, pour the tea, then bow and quietly back out of the room. The guest would, drink their tea, go back to sleep, or get up, get dressed, and then go to the dining room for breakfast. The tea tray would be retrieved during the day whenever the room was tidied up. A few of our older American Missionaries got to like having their early morning tea. It made them feel very special. In turn, they liked to serve early morning tea to special visitors, and new missionaries, without warning them. The plan was to quickly immerse the guest in the local customs and language, and teach them how much they still needed to learn. However, at least one time, the visit did not go as planned!

Two Nazarene families, in America, found that the more money they gave to their Church, the more they prospered. They proved that they could not out-give God! Their unselfish donations helped build several Nazarene Schools, Clinics and Churches in Swaziland and the Republic of South Africa. Jim, a young man from one family married Rosie, a young lady from the other family. For their honeymoon their parents gave them an all expense paid trip to South Africa, including a tour of the mission projects where their parents' money had been spent.

The Church of the Nazarene Headquarters, in Kansas City, was quick to notify South African Headquarters, in Johannesburg, about this important couple. The staff members were told to make sure that the couple got "The Royal Treatment", usually reserved just for top Church Leaders. Special Celebrations were planned at some Mission Stations to honor the couple. Wes, from the South Africa office was elected as the tour guide for the visitors. The trip went just as Wes had hoped, until they stopped for two days at Endingeni Mission in the mountains of Swaziland. This is where the first Nazarene Mission was started and the first Church was built. That small stone Church has been preserved. Harmon Schmelzembach, the first Missionary, and his three young children are buried there! (The children died from malnutrition, their dad died from Malaria.) However, Wes made one slip up. He assumed, that, since the two older single Missionary ladies in charge, were American, they would not be serving any early morning tea!

After a wonderful tour of Endingeni and two outstations, all of them ate a delicious supper. Everyone was tired from all the day's activities and went to bed early. Wes told the guests that he would knock on their door, the next morning, when it was time to get dressed for breakfast.

The newlywed couple woke up, earlier than they expected. They were wide awake and found the clear mountain air very stimulating and refreshing. It was still too early to get up so they soon were engaged

in some very amorous activity. At the worst time for all those concerned, there was a gentle knock on their door. Jim yelled "OK", assuming it was their wake up call. They were too "engaged", in their activity, to see the sleepy eyed older single missionary lady shuffling into the room looking down at the large tea tray, holding a large ceramic tea pot, creamer, sugar bowl, cups and saucers, as well as some goodies.

Only when she was starting to place the tray beside the couple, did the Missionary see what the couple was doing. She screamed and dropped the tray with a loud crash that was heard all over that big house. The floor was solid concrete! The second lady assumed that her friend had tripped and fallen, so she came running into the room, in a disheveled state, stepping on broken shards of pottery, slippery milk, sugar and tea; then she saw the couple and realized the source of problem.

Wes had been very tired. He slept through all the noise and embarrassment. His comment, afterwards; "That was the quietest breakfast I have ever eaten. Whenever, the two missionaries and the couple looked at each other their faces would become very red. It was hard for them to speak to one another. We found an excuse to leave that morning instead of staying an extra night at Endingeni."

After that, when any new missionary couples or visitors were coming to visit us, we would try to warn them, ahead of time, about the hotels, or the missionaries, who served EARLY MORNING TEA.

P.S. There are other, more embarrassing, incidents that occurred on the Mission Field, but I have been sworn to secrecy! They are our Missionary Family secrets. They shall remain safely locked up in the vaults of our memories. Some have even started to fade away.