

PBM - 1  
Servant Advice

Meikle's Hotel  
Salisbury,  
Southern Rhodesia  
July 3, 1953

Mr. Walter S. Rogers  
c/o Institute of Current World Affairs  
522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

"I don't want to scare you, but you must remember that the native in Southern Rhodesia is only 50 years removed from being a savage." A. J. Bull, longtime resident of Salisbury and manager of Meikle's Hotel where my wife and I are staying, told us that today with the air of a man who has said the same thing over and over again.

We had just left the dining room, and spotting Bull in his office with apparently nothing to occupy him but his thoughts, we went in to tell him we had rented a house. Part of the leasing bargain is that we are to keep the native house boy in our employ. When we told Bull this he ran his hand over his somewhat balding head and in a very fatherly manner began to give us advice of which the quotation above was the theme.

"That's fine, that's fine, if he's a good boy," Bull said. "But if he's a bad boy, look out. He'll drop your best glasses and china just from spite. He'll steal if he can and if he can't, he'll leave, with or without a reason."

By this time Julie was almost visibly alarmed--until Bull told her that she should treat her servant just as she would treat a 12-year-old child. That has become such a familiar phrase to us we both relaxed and smiled. Before we left St. Louis we heard it from a friend who is a tobacco planter near Salisbury. Miss de Souza, from whom we are renting our house, told us the same thing as she showed us the various rooms we were to occupy. And a pamphlet issued by the Department of Public Relations of Southern Rhodesia told us the same thing.

Almost every European home in Salisbury has one, two, or more house boys. As far as I can tell, this is true of most of Southern Rhodesia. These boys are specially trained, have their own quarters, are entitled to special ration allotments, and require very special handling.

Miss de Souza, for instance, lives in a very modest one story house. To take care of the living room, kitchen, dining room, two bedrooms, bathroom and the garden, she employs two boys. One cooks and cleans, the other cares for the garden and the appearance of the outside of the house. The cooking and inside cleaning boy is considered "good." He arrives early in the morning, prepares tea, and serves it at 6:30 a.m. He never takes it into Miss de Souza's room. The government pamphlet, entitled "Your Servant and You," says:

"The African is modest. Be as modest before him as before any man of your own race. Respect his ideas about women. You may think him a savage--and in many cases his moral outlook has little in common with ours--but he never allows even a small native girl to appear naked before a man or boy, so your little girl should not do this."<sup>1</sup>

After the boy serves tea he prepares breakfast while Miss de S. is getting out of bed and into her clothing. After breakfast he washes the dishes and then spends the rest of the morning cleaning the house. Miss de S. prepares her own dinner (luncheon) because she says she has found the boy likes to clean, takes his time about it, and consequently does not have time to cook in the middle of the day.

He has his own way of doing things, Miss de S. says about the boy. She says that as far as she can tell, once a native learns how to perform a task, he will use the same method for the rest of his life. For instance, he will not use a carpet sweeper to clean the rugs. He prefers to get down on his hands and knees and use a small brush. The few times he did use a sweeper, according to Miss de S., he did damage to the furniture, either intentionally or accidentally.

He is thorough. Each task he is given he does completely. There are no loose ends to be taken care of when he is through. He finishes his cleaning after lunch, except on Monday when he washes clothing and household linen, then goes home to his quarters. He returns before supper time, to wash the tea utensils and help prepare dinner. After he has finished with the dinner dishes, he returns to his quarters.

There are two schools of thought about treatment of native house servants. One school says the only thing a native will understand is the fist, used liberally. The other school advocates kind, firm, fair treatment.

Miss De S. belongs to the latter school. Her servant (who soon is to be ours) speaks English and is insulted when orders are given in "Kitchen Kaffir," the language, part English, part native, which is generally used to give household orders. His knowledge of English, in his opinion, puts him a step above the common, garden variety of servants. In conversation with Julie, Miss de S. has outlined the following rules for maintaining discipline and keeping the house well run.

1. Never strike the house boy.
2. Never become angry without just cause.
3. Make sure all orders are given clearly.
4. Be pleasant, not overbearing.
5. Always be fair--in allotment of work and payment of wages.
6. Treat the servant as though he is a small child.

One of the reasons Miss de S.'s boy is considered so good is that he has not left her for three years. Bull, on the other hand, has trouble maintaining a staff of 60 boys to run the hotel dining room. According to him, they have no sense of responsibility. They do not have to work and therefore when they have accumulated enough money to buy new clothing or to buy cattle (with which they can purchase a wife) they leave.

Sometimes they return in a week or two, Bull says, and when they are asked where they have been, they always say that they have been sick or have been visiting a sick relative. Every native has a sick relative, usually his mother, who must be visited when the native servant finds life at the hotel too confining, according to Bull.

He was somewhat amazed when we told him that Miss de S.'s boy had planned to visit his mother during her proposed stay in England, but when she asked him to stay on and work for us, he agreed. On the other hand, Miss de S. says that many of her friends have kept servants for long periods of time and that they seem to respond to normally good treatment.

In the pamphlet it was suggested that the houseboy be given one afternoon off a week and one afternoon and evening during which he would not be required to return and prepare supper. As I noted above, Miss de S. gives her boy every afternoon off plus an evening a week. She also exceeds the suggested food allowance as shown below:

	<u>SUGGESTED</u>	<u>MISS de S.</u>
Corn meal	1½ lbs. per day	2 lbs. per day
Meat	½ lb. per day (poor quality)	½ lb. or slightly more per day (good quality)
Vegetables	twice a week	twice a week and other times when there is some left over
Sugar	1 lb. per week	1 lb. per week
Dried beans	1 lb. per week	1 lb. per week
Salt	As much as is required	As much as is required
Table scraps	Whatever is left over	Whatever is left over
Tea	None	¼ lb. per week
Soap	None	1 small cake each week

The pamphlet suggests that cookboys receive wages of from £2 to £5 (pounds) per month and houseboys receive from 30/ to 40/ (shillings) per month depending on previous experience. Miss de S. pays her combination house- and cookboy £3 10/ per month. Her garden boy receives 30/ per month, which is slightly more than is suggested.

It is interesting to note that Miss de S. keeps a cat (Cleopatra, by name) and that the cat receives 2½ lbs. of meat a week while the native servants get by on 3½ lbs.

By way of comparison, Julie says that it would be impossible to get experienced servants in the United States for anything near the suggested £2 (\$5.60) to £5 (\$14.00).

Each employer (which means us, in a few days) is responsible for the conduct of the natives employed by him. Miss de S.'s natives sleep in a small brick hut at the rear of her property. It is up to her to see that the quarters are kept free of flies, mosquitoes and other insects. She must supply all clean clothing for them and, if they become sick, take them to the native hospital in Salisbury.

All natives must be in their quarters by 9 o'clock each night unless their employer grants them a special pass to attend a party or visit a friend or relative. These special passes are granted rarely and police in and around the city of Salisbury stop and question all natives found out of their quarters after 9 p.m.

Natives are not allowed to "take in boarders;" that is, they may not have friends in to spend the night. Miss de S. told us not to worry if a bicycle crunched up the driveway at night. "It will only be a police officer checking to see if everything is all right in the native house."

Julie asked Miss de S. how servants could be obtained to replace a boy who disappeared in the night to visit his "sick mother."

"Just wait, Mrs. Martin," was the answer. "Soon the word will get around that your boy has left and other natives will come to look you over. If they like what they see, they will ask to work for you. Never, under any circumstances, go out and look for a boy. If you do that the natives will get the idea there is something wrong with your house and you will wash your own dishes for a long time."

Needless to say we can't wait until July 10 comes and we can move into our new house.

Sincerely yours,



Peter Bird Martin

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