

Returning from Oz

Jackie Wilson Asheeke

I am back in Kansas, Toto and things have changed immensely. Returning after 33 years in Oz, the world I left in the USA is unrecognizable in many levels. This is not a shock, however. Imagine what a horrible world it would be if in three decades nothing changed! What I am slogging through is the need to move as quickly as possible to catch up and restart my life. The journey is expensive, frustrating, sad, hilarious and eyebrow-raising (cue Spock on Star Trek reruns, no...wait, TV has changed too).

This series of articles on my re-orientation to my small part of the USA after living abroad for most of my post-grad school life is my attempt to document the pitfalls so that I don't step into the poo continuously. It is a way for me to laugh instead of cry at the magnitude of what I must learn. It is clear each day I interact with people, that I need to learn this stuff yesterday.

In November 1988, I married a liberation fighter from southern Africa. In March 1990, the Republic of Namibia won its freedom and I jumped on board smiling all the way. My Prince Charming didn't come for me in shining armor on a white charger. My knight wore bush fatigues and was a communist freedom fighter riding a zebra and holding an AK47. Go figure.

The fairytale ended and I divorced in January 2021 after 33 years of marriage and globetrotting. I landed at my sister's beautiful house in Wilmington, Delaware as a jobless refugee from Oz.

Back in the day, my then hubby was appointed Ambassador to the US and the UN. As an ambassador's wife, I lived in or traveled to over 30 countries as Madam Asheeke of Namibia.

Ex-hubby was promoted and called home for duty in 2003, and I began my work as CEO of the tourism industry there. More travel was on the cards and it was all good. Then, I shifted to a career as a Senior Editor of a newspaper for six years. Life was still reasonably good.

While I was away for so many years, I visited home, family and friends in DC, CA, IN, AZ, and DE once a year.

Returning from over the rainbow six weeks per year is not the same as permanently living here. The details of life in the USA were firmly in the rearview mirror of my mind. Rhino horn poachers and drought were more important to me than who Kim Kardashian or JLo were marrying.

I remember visiting home a week before the verdict in the OJ Simpson trial.

Everyone was buzzing about it, and I had no idea what they were talking about. I knew OJ Simpson as a football star who broke a rushing record while at the Buffalo Bills. I ignored the whole thing. I didn't bother to focus on things that didn't affect my day-to-day life in Oz.

My world after the diplomatic life shifted to the promotion of tourism. Otherwise, I was annoyed by the pesky proliferation of yellow-tailed mongoose bands in my garden and the horrible exchange rate of the South African Rand to the US dollar (my kids were in university in the USA.)

The internet and having college-age kids woke me up to tech and the internet possibilities. After drill sergeant-style lessons from my kids, I learned how to use a smartphone and realized it is a fantastic thing. My youngest daughter made me ditch my 10-year-old Nokia with its original iconic ring tone, stop buying DVDs, give away my mini-digital camera, stop writing grocery lists on paper, switch to eBooks and audiobooks, and bury my MP3 player. She shamed me regularly until I complied. Bravo to her. WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook and Pinterest rock! I learn new stuff every day, but I still struggle to say 'quinoa' properly though.

God bless NFL.com and its arrival online for fans abroad. I am an American football junkie who was denied a fix for a long time (Is it PC to still make that drug analogy?) I missed the NFL from 1991-2012. I saw the Superbowl a few years and sometimes, while living in Germany, I caught a few games.

But the players were all new names. I never heard of the Jacksonville and Carolina teams until the 2013 season! I had to adjust to the Ravens being the former Cleveland Browns while there is still a Cleveland team? And I still don't understand clearly what happened to the Houston Oilers.

No matter...I am getting up to speed on all of that. I am learning about the great achievements of superstars during my missing years. (Sorry, LaDainian, I never saw you play) Thank God and Redzone, this sista' is back and Aaron and Ma-homey are my new stars.

My family chides me because Peyton Manning is my favourite...oops...I mean favorite football player. For me, he is the greatest of all time, Brady notwithstanding. But I never saw him play for the Baltimore...oops...I mean the Indianapolis Colts. That team move happened while I was still in the US, but somehow, it didn't sink in.

Peyton is only a Denver Bronco in my mind. I have the Hallmark Christmas ornament to prove it!

My next articles will be about my shock at the changes in the taste of Twinkies and Ho-Hos (leave aside the name that is no longer PC). Hey folks - amazon is not just for books! Whassup with all the different tv channels? And how come fast-food French fries are so yucky? I am learning to understand American English again.

Hurray.

I will also write about the more puzzling and challenging changes that I see. Bring back Rather! – since when do reporters and anchors give their opinions on air as news? Health coverage is

not health insurance and how I got ripped off on my first outing. In Africa, grey hair is a crown; in the US, it is a curse. How is it possible to show commercials advertising gambling and prescription drugs (the latter will mostly kill you if you listen to their tv disclaimers)? And finally, there is the destruction of the America I remember courtesy of rabid political intolerance. Where did that come from, and can we send it back?

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She is a former CEO of the tourism industry in Namibia, held several board positions and was a small business mentor. She has written and edited over 5,000 articles, columns and reports. She is an author and has finished her first fictional novel series and is shopping around for an editor, literary agent and publishing house.

If you publish this or any other piece on my website, please use my name as the author and my website as a contact. I am a starving author with monthly health and life insurance premiums to pay. All revenue, no matter how small, is welcome.

How do you stuff evil back into its hole?

Posted by [Observer](#) | Jan 23, 2021 | [Observer Opinion](#) | [0](#) |

Jackie Wilson Asheeke

I drove through Washington, DC two days before the inauguration of President Joe Biden. I had flashbacks to a drive through DC when I was in pre-school, two days after Dr Martin Luther King's assassination. The soldiers, tanks, sirens, and flashing lights were everywhere then and now. I shuddered at seeing weapons in plain sight. The scrutinizing eyes of armed white men made my blood run cold as a child and now as an adult.

I know intellectually that the massive show of force was needed to keep the extremist right-wing lunatic fringe from easily acting out their wet dreams about killing, blowing things up and destruction. 'He Who Shall Not Be Named' but is thankfully now the former US president, released an evil that has always lurked in the hearts of certain people. Can Good President Joe stuff that evil back into its hole?

While in DC, we took my brother back to his hotel after my mother's funeral mass. We had to cross the bridges over the Potomac to get to Crystal City, Virginia to the Marriot. The main bridges had already been closed by that time. We had to take the tunnel under the Potomac as that was the only way across. Even that would be closed the next morning. Aside from the major traffic jams caused by Washington's military lockdown, I felt both comforted by the military presence and profoundly sad that they had to be there.

Driving through various DC neighbourhoods, I saw men in military fatigues on patrol. It was just like in 1968 when I saw men with guns marching up our street towards the Old Soldier's Home, a military complex near our house back then. I remember that I thought the marching men were exciting; Mom was horrified.

I was far too young to understand what was happening in the riots after the King assassination. I 'get it' now. And yet, I still feel equally conflicted on some levels. Is the only way to fight violence to be violent? Perhaps my exposure to pacifist Quakerism in undergraduate school has infected me. To fight fire with fire leaves everything burned down. But, to let armed lunatics run amok will destroy everything. "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing," – Edmund Burke.

This is why I am still conflicted looking at nearly the same scenes of military occupation in Washington, DC over 50 years later.

There were a couple of brothas' who came strapped to mom's funeral – feel me on this point. I support their precaution. It was too volatile to be out on the streets of Washington with no self-protection. Anything could have jumped off. As a child, I recall seeing my neighbors loading their weapons to protect their homes back in 1968. Armed white men marching through a black neighborhood is never a calming thing. Ask the Black people who survived Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921 and other places.

No one who forcefully disagrees with 'He Who Shall Not Be Named' is safe from violence or the threat of violence yet. I believe that America will find a way to make a change.

Joe Biden may emerge as a figure in history like Abraham Lincoln or FDR. They were presidents who took the reins of power during trying times that threatened to destroy the country. The USA will prevail over the current bad times (even with COVID killing 400,000 people), but Biden must shape what kind of USA will emerge.

I loved Biden's inaugural statement that people must be able to disagree and not want to tear each other apart for it.

Good President Joe's inaugural message was not just for the 74 million who did not vote for him or the 80 million who did and the 60 million who didn't vote. It was also for the fringe left-wing also wants their voice to be the only one. They will 'cancel' anyone thinking otherwise. Biden needs to try hard to challenge that thinking too.

When people consciously choose to not listen to any voice other than their own, it is a bad thing; it doesn't matter whether they are on the left or right.

None of this means that black men when confronted by the police are necessarily safer in the USA than before. But it does mean that the value of a black life (or trepidation about the response after taking a black life) has risen in America. Can Biden raise a black man's life to the country's value level of a rich white woman's? Probably not, but it is comforting to know that a good man will be sincerely trying.

'He who shall not be named' opened Pandora's Box during a nightmare presidency. Good President Biden must now close it. Can he?