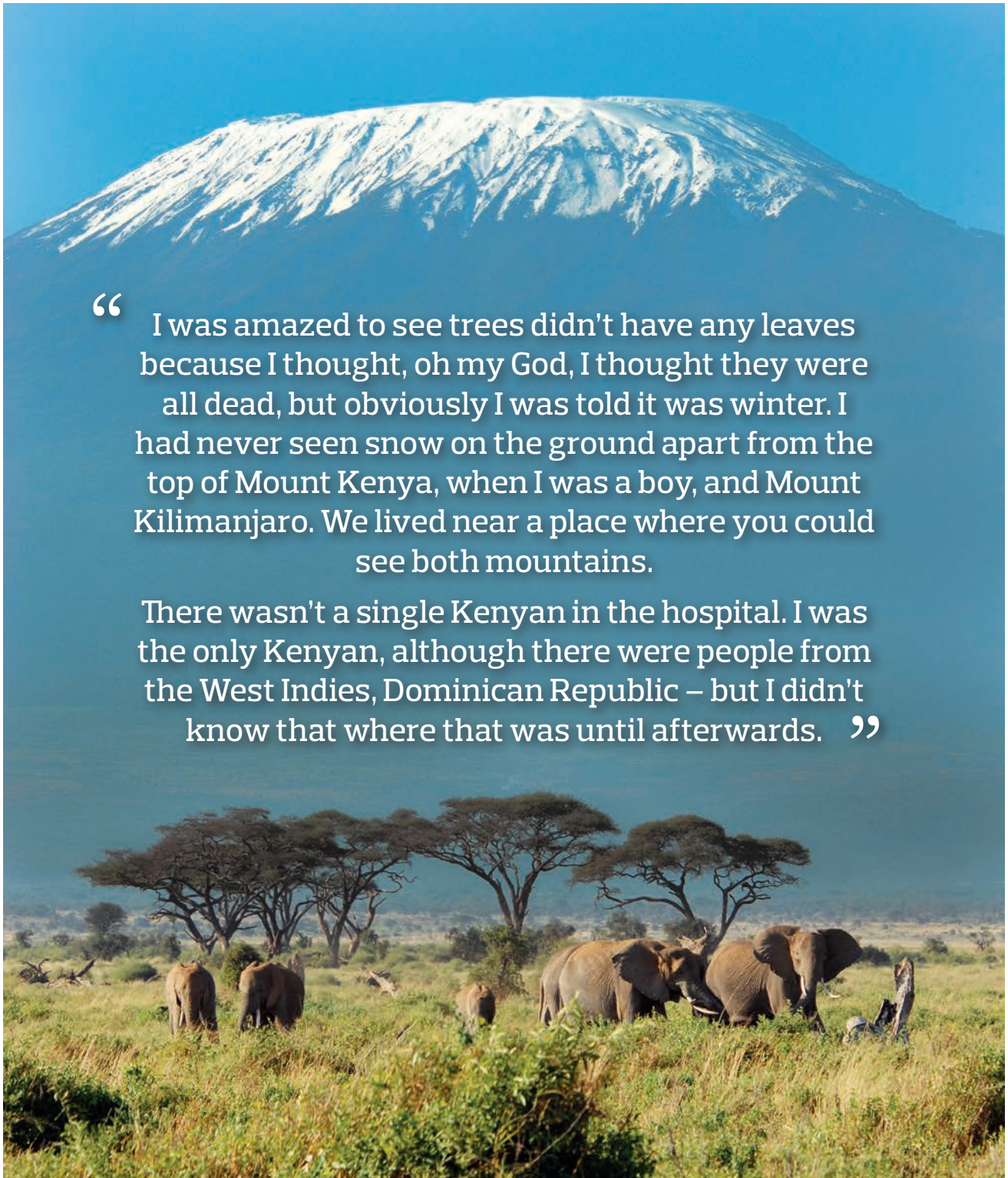


8: Britain relies on nurses from overseas



“ I was amazed to see trees didn't have any leaves because I thought, oh my God, I thought they were all dead, but obviously I was told it was winter. I had never seen snow on the ground apart from the top of Mount Kenya, when I was a boy, and Mount Kilimanjaro. We lived near a place where you could see both mountains.

There wasn't a single Kenyan in the hospital. I was the only Kenyan, although there were people from the West Indies, Dominican Republic – but I didn't know that where that was until afterwards. ”

Quote from nurse Steve Kimatta
21st March 2007

8: Britain relies on nurses from overseas

Steve Kimatta was born and raised in Kenya. In 1965 came to England and got a job as a nursing assistant. Although he found some aspects of life in Britain surprising, Kimatta felt welcome and supported. He settled in Britain, qualified as a nurse and, while keeping in touch with his family in Kenya, he remained in Britain, working in learning disability, psychiatric and older people's nursing.

Nurse shortages

Kimatta said "At the time [I came to the UK] there was no problem getting a visa I think because maybe there was a need for nurses at that time."

Nurse shortages were a common problem throughout the twentieth century, for several reasons:

- **The 'marriage bar'** discouraged women from working once married. This affected nursing, as the majority of the workforce was female. The marriage bar was gradually lifted from 1944 onwards.
- **The Second World War** caused labour shortages across the British economy.

- **The demands of the job.** Nurses worked long, hard hours and had to struggle to gain pay and status that reflected this.
- **Emigration.** Attracted by higher wages, many British nurses migrated to English-speaking countries.
- **The launch of the NHS in 1948.** Access to free medical care for the whole population led to significantly increased demand for nurses.

Immigrant nurses

Health care workers from abroad became vital to Britain. Targeted overseas recruitment began in the 1930s. In 1949, the RCN worked with the government to launch campaigns to recruit hospital staff from the Caribbean and Europe, particularly Ireland. Nurses from overseas were often recruited into the least popular areas of health care, such as mental health and learning disability, and not always offered the best training opportunities. It is estimated that by 1965, 35% of nursing staff in Britain were born overseas. Today, the NHS across the UK continues to depend on the contribution of nurses from overseas.

Activity

Steve Kimatta's account comes from an oral history interview, recorded by the Royal College of Nursing. Interview the person next to you about a time they experienced a culture shock or visited a place very different from home. What

did they see and do? How did they feel? Make sure to swap roles so that both of you have an opportunity to be the interviewer. Then consider the benefits and problems of using personal accounts as a source material in history.

Fact: All nurses who work in the UK must be registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). Overseas nursing qualifications must meet the UK standards to be recognised by the NMC.