

# Real life

When Lesley Robinson, from West Yorkshire, visited an African witch doctor, she was amazed by the results. Now Lesley is using the powers of the village magician to help others

By Deborah Dooley

**J**ust four years ago, Lesley Robinson, 51, was happy with her life. 'I was divorced, but had a comfortable salary as a clinical marketing manager with a pharmaceutical company, and had two daughters, Jo, now 31, and Kate, now 28,' she says.

But in April 1999, a visit to a tiny African village was to turn Lesley's life around. 'I'd recently met my partner, Glyn, a 43-year-old engineer, and we were looking forward to a holiday in Zimbabwe,' she explains.

'The previous January, I'd injured my knee, and despite medication, I was in constant pain. When we arrived in the glorious Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe, I could barely walk, and our guide, Bagman, offered to take us to see the local witch doctor.

'Bagman drove us to a tiny village and introduced us to Mr N'dbele, the headman of the village, who explained that his second wife, Roseanna, was the witch doctor.'

Asking Lesley and Glyn to take off their shoes, Mr N'dbele ushered the couple into a hut. 'Roseanna was seated on the floor, surrounded by bunches of herbs, wearing porcupine quills in her hair and a necklace made of snakes' teeth,' says Lesley. 'I liked her on sight – she seemed warm, but I felt overawed by her, too.'

'Roseanna looked at my knee. "How did you hurt yourself?" she asked, as Bagman translated. "I can help you," she said, "but I must consult with the spirits. Today is their day of rest, so come back tomorrow." We thanked her and left.

'Glyn and I giggled about the idea of spirits having a day off, but Bagman told us that spirits have never worked on Wednesdays.

'The next day, Roseanna said that the spirits had told her to gather some roots for me. I was to boil them up and dab the liquid from it on my bad knee and also on the good one – to protect it.

'Hopeful, but sceptical, I followed Roseanna's instructions, and on the following morning, I managed to walk 14 kilometres without painkillers



Roseanna dressed in all her witch doctor finery



Lesley with Roseanna, whose remedies inspired Lesley to launch her own herbal company

## A witch doctor changed my life

– Roseanna's herbal medicine had worked miracles on my knee.

'We returned to thank Roseanna. I gave her the equivalent of about £6, and the whole village whooped and clapped with delight. "I can't believe how happy these people are when they have so little," I said to Glyn.'

Inspired by Roseanna's success, Lesley's fascination with African remedies grew. She continues, 'We

daughter's eczema," one mother told me. "Please give me some of your magic cream."

'A pharmacist in Zimbabwe agreed to supply us with the cream. We combined it with wheatgerm oil, lavender and aloe to make it more effective, and called it Themba – which means "hope".

"Look at these," I said to Glyn, holding up photos of a child's legs ravaged by eczema – and his smooth skin after using Themba. "How can I not give this venture 100 per cent?"

Glyn agreed, and in December 1999, The Little Herbal Company was born. 'Since then, we've launched Simba – a supplement from the African potato tuber plant, which was what healed my knee,' says Lesley. 'Simba has been shown scientifically to strengthen the immune system and helps people with ME, MS, Lupus and many other health problems. 'Glyn and I are frequent visitors to

the village where it all started. On our last visit, we took Roseanna a sewing machine. She's learned some English – but when we gave it to her, she didn't need to speak. Her rapt expression said it all.

'Profits from The Little Herbal Company have recently paid for a maternity wing to be added on to a local clinic. It's our way of putting something back into the country that has given us so much.'

And in January this year, Lesley and Glyn got married in Zimbabwe. 'The high point was the day after, at our "bush wedding",' she says. 'Roseanna blessed our union, and the village threw a party for us. It was magical.

'Roseanna's delighted with our success – and I'll never forget what she said to me when we started up. "Every time you sell a jar, say a word of thanks to the spirits." And I do!

**You can contact The Little Herbal Company via their website, [www.littleherbal.co.uk](http://www.littleherbal.co.uk), or call 01484 685100.**

### 'Roseanna's herbal medicine worked miracles on my knee'

found some healing ointment from the kigelia tree and brought it home for friends with skin problems. Word spread about its effectiveness, and soon we were being swamped with requests for more. Complete strangers began stopping us in the street. "Nothing's worked on my