

October 15, 2006

It's my birthday and I thought it would be appropriate to thank all that sent me cards and emails and also to give you an update of my life here in exotic Zanzibar. And also to tell you how much I have appreciated all of your emails over the past few months – they helped immensely as I was so ill and depressed.

As many of you know I have been very very ill for 8 months and I am FINALLY feeling better. I had gone back to the US in April and May with a bad back and having an MS episode. An orthopedist diagnosed my back as a herniated disc and sent me to a physical therapist. But it got worse and wasn't until I returned to Zanzibar that it was finally diagnosed correctly (by a woman I met who's from the Mayo Clinic no less). I changed all of my exercises and have had chiropractors come to my house to treat me and I can now sit at the computer for longer than 15 minutes at a time. The MS episode was scary on top of the back and I went to Boston for tests and met another MS doc (besides my neurologist) who is absolutely fantastic!!!! I had an MRI and now have lesions in my spine so it's a bit difficult for me to deny that I have MS. The good thing is that the episodes do subside but I have been dealing with lots of fatigue and a few other things that I just have to adapt to. I have finally decided to go on CoPaxone, the MS drug. I will have to inject myself every day at least until they come out with a pill form. The last episode scared me and I realized that I just have way too much more to do with my life and I want to stay as healthy as possible. I haven't started yet as it's going to take a bit for us to figure out how to get it over here.

As usual life is interesting here – we are coming into the vuli (short) rains – so it may rain for an hour or so once or twice a day and then the sun shines brightly. I love that there is always a breeze here and of course I'm comfortable living in my beautiful rooftop penthouse. Yet I do live in Africa and there are some adjustments to make. There has been a very bad drought this past year and two of the power plants broke down on the mainland so power has been cut drastically. In Dar they have no power EVERY single day from 7:00am to 7:00pm – it has been going on for 9 months and it's an economic disaster. And it's ruining the environment – every other store and home has a generator spouting out horrible fumes. Many of the small businesses have gone under as they can't afford to pay for the generator fuel and a number of the businesses have relocated to Zanzibar. For some reason, and many different reasons, Zanzibar had no power problems until two weeks ago. They decided to start cutting power every day for 4 hours. I thought that I had figured out the schedule but last week we had power all day on Sunday and today it went out at 2:00 – it should come back on in a few minutes (it's almost 6:00pm). The bummer is that my friend Helen and I were watching a movie and poof – no power!!! I actually kind of like it because I have to either sit and read or visit friends when the power is out – it's an interesting form of forced relaxation.

This is also the 22nd day of Ramadhan which I don't mind at all. Everyone fasts during the day so people only work in the morning so that they can rest in the afternoon. Futari, the breaking of the fast, is at sunset – around 6:30. And then they will eat again around 11:30 pm and then at 3:30 or 4:00am. I don't fast and that's just fine. I do my own cooking in my home so I don't have a problem but the majority of the restaurants are closed during the day and there are no food vendors on the street. So – we socialize by having futari with our friends and I rather like it. Eid will be Oct 22 or 23 I think (depending on the moon) and then we'll have sikuku – which is the celebration for the end of Ramadhan. Everyone has beautiful new clothes and I just love watching them walk to the fairgrounds for the celebrations.

Quick update on a few sad things in my life – my stepmother, Jane, died awhile ago. She had been in an assisted living and also had Alzheimer's and it was her time to go. I did visit with her the last time I was in the US although she didn't know who I was. But I am grateful that I got to know her better after my dad died – she and I became pretty good friends and I miss her.

Trevor, who many of you know – he lived with me here for 6 months – has been diagnosed with advanced colon cancer. His father died of it and it was a horrible death. Trevor is in Oregon staying on the coast with friends (he can hear the sea lions outside his window) and feeling quite good right now. He has contacted a hospice that he's happy with and also the Death with Dignity group. He is 78 and would like to die with as much dignity as possible and I respect his decision. I probably will not be visiting him before he dies but we are in phone contact which is nice.

Okay – enough talk – I know you all like my photo stories the best so I've tried to choose ones that document much of what I've been doing since I came back in May. I may live in Africa but I do live in exotic Zanzibar, a tourist island, and often enjoy the best that life can offer.



This is during ZIFF (Zanzibar Int'l Film Festival). The French Bastille Day party was on opening night around the pool at the Serena Hotel. I was too ill to be able to go to any of the movies but I did make sure to get to a few of the parties. So now I'll do some name dropping – on the left I'm with Farouk, who is my friend and chairman of the Board of Trustees of ZAPHA+, and on my right is Malick Bowens who is an actor. On the right I'm with Melvin van Peebles and a friend. I met some very interesting movie directors and others involved with film in Africa. I also visited with the French and American ambassadors and the British High Commissioner (who is very nice). We are a small island and we all know each other. We have a wonderful film festival in July and a magnificent music festival in February. They're not as fancy as some others but we certainly enjoy ourselves and so do all the guests who attend. I'm trying to also show my every day life here – in the center is the local bakery that I go to – it's so wonderful to get fresh bread right out of the oven (yes that is the oven in the rock on the left)



I went to a wedding in July – everyone wanted to have their photo taken with me. We went to the groom's house and the women sat outside on mats, eating _____ and drinking tea. The men sat on separate mats not far away. We then climbed into buses and went to a VERY rural house (had to walk the last ½ mile) for the wedding ceremony. Seif Maalim, the groom, is a friend of mine and a commentator for TV Zanzibar. His wife is the daughter of the vice president of Zanzibar – it was the first time that I met her. Seif is from a Muslim sect that is quite strict and so there was no music at the wedding. I sat with the women in a different part of the house and the men sat outside while the ceremony was performed inside. It was my first wedding and I hope that my next one has music. On the right is a vendor selling mtandios – the shawls that we women wear. They are so beautiful and it's hard to pass by without buying at least one!!



On the left is Arthur and his boat that he sailed up from South Africa. He's one of some consultants who were here working with a friend of mine. A whole bunch of us went sailing up the coast one day – beautiful but the sea was choppy!!! In the middle is the well that I had dug in Chejuu, a very rural village. A friend donated \$1,000.00 and I had ZEDO (Zanzibar Enterprise Development Organization), a local NGO build it. On the left is Shabani Mohamed is the builder (tall) and next to him is Abla of ZEDO – then me and Yussuf who is the friend I first visited when I realized how much a well could benefit their village. People no longer have to walk over 2 km to get water and the village is growing and becoming stronger because of it. On the right is Isaac my Masai friend who sells his jewelry on the street. I took this yesterday as it will be his last day there – the government has decided to clean up the streets and get rid of all of the vendors (memories of NYC?). He says he'll probably have to go back to Arusha which is on the mainland near the Serengeti Plains. They cleaned out the streets in Dar and put all the vendors in one area but it's so far out of town that no one will ever go there. It will be interesting to see how it all develops.



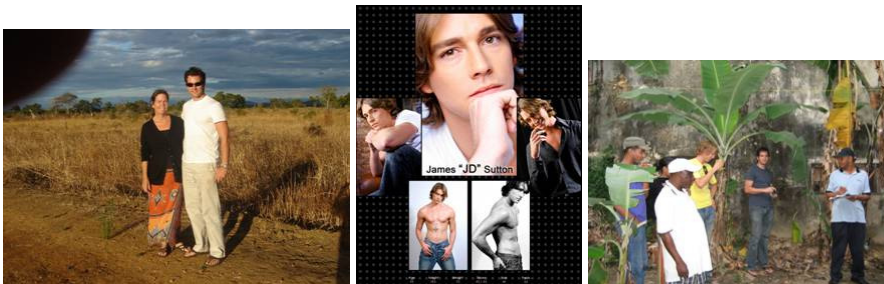
Yes I have been ill but this is the best place in the world to heal. One of the bad things about living in a foreign country is that most of my friends leave – they have contracts that usually don't last more than 2 years. On the right is my Swedish friend Anna, myself and my British friend Helen (not a great photo but you get the idea). This was taken at one of my many parties. Anna has been with a marine development NGO and Helen is director of Chumbe Island, an eco-tourist resort island. Anna returned to Sweden at the end of August but we treated ourselves and spent a night at Breezes – a 5 star resort up the coast. I had a Thai massage and a private yoga class (what a life I lead!!!). I'm going to try to go away somewhere in Jan or Feb and considering India or Sri Lanka – it would be great to be able to go someplace and meditate but we'll see.



On either end are my chiropractors – now you won't believe this. I have Canadian friends who have a free clinic (and the most beautiful home right on the ocean) down the coast. They have a waiting list of chiropractors and other health care workers who come and volunteer on a 2 or 3 month basis. They pay their own expenses but get to stay in the beautiful house and they come into town once a week (where I live). Bruce on the left saw me four times then Carolyn on the right arrived with her kids for a month. They would come to my house every Wednesday morning to adjust me and give me new exercises – all for free (but of course I will donate to the clinic) – where could I ever get that in the US??? In the center Anna and I are having a meal with Seif and his family at their house. Seif is our coordinator for ZAPHA+ and absolutely incredible. He's been married for over 20 years (his wife in the orange doesn't look older than 18) and has 4 children. Saleh on the right is his 14 year old son and very typical – hates going to school and just wants to hang out with his friends!!!



And then Keith came to visit me at the end of July!!! What a treat that was – he's living in San Francisco and finished his grad school classes to become a psychologist in June. He wasn't going to start his internship until September so he came to Africa to see mom. Alanna wasn't able to come with him but she and Keith IM'd every day and they will definitely come back again. Keith and I went to Chumbe Island on the left – that's the island my friend Helen runs. They have a protected coral reef and we had a great time snorkeling. They have only 8 bungalows on the island and it's just a wonderful and peaceful place to relax. Then we went on safari – Keith is standing by a pond with hippos in it although you can't see them. And of course the giraffes who are always very curious as to who those tourists are watching them!



Here is another safari photo and on the right is Keith waiting his turn while playing golf at my friend Emerson's. This is his own personal golf course and it's the silliest thing in the world in the middle of an area of banana trees. In the center is my other son JD who is still living in Indonesia

– he has a place in Bali but spends most of his time in Jakarta where, yes he is a model!!! Who would have ever thought. My oldest will be a psychologist and the youngest is becoming famous. Hopefully JD will be able to visit me at some point next year and maybe I'll go to Bali. The only problem is that our seasons are the same – so the best time of year here is also the best time of year there. Many people tell me that Bali and Zanzibar are very similar – interesting that we each live in some the most exotic islands in the world!!!



And here we are at the end – in the center is the CHAI (Clinton HIV/AIDS Initiative) crew. We have me, Tumaini (who works in the Dar office), Alex, the new deputy director (she's from Australia), Jacquie, an American volunteer working in ZNZ doing an orphan project, and Esther who is originally from Dar and is the project manager for CHAI here in Zanzibar. Alex arrived a month ago and we've become fast friends – her birthday was last week so we went up to another 5 star resort called the Ocean Paradise for the weekend. On the right is our room that was right on the ocean – god it was amazing inside – the architecture is very interesting. On the left is the pool and beach – we are sitting up in a small area having drinks and in the evening it was getting dark and we watched the moon rise right out of the ocean in the center there. It was huge and red and utterly breathtaking. They we ate dinner around the pool while a band played soft music. I went up again yesterday just for the day – it doesn't cost us anything to just hang out for the day. I've become friends with the manager and hope to go up every few months to relax. What a life – my goodness – I am by far the most fortunate woman in the world.

I haven't written at all about my work as I plan on doing that later in the month. There have been so many wonderful things happening and I'll have lots to tell you. My life here is very busy but I do get lonely to hear from all of you at home so please keep those emails and letters coming!!!

Kathryn