Diary – Visit September 2017

AKA “What can I say – really this place is completely nuts.”

**Wednesday September 13th – Sunday September 17th**

Due to the chaotic and stressful nature of this visit to Tanzania I have not been able to keep an accurate daily account of our various events and happenings. Instead I am attempting to sum up the first few days insofar as I can recall what has happened and when it happened so please bear with me.

The Journey

We took off late from Birmingham due to the weather conditions in Amsterdam and had a pretty bumpy landing due to strong cross winds. We arrived at the time that our flight was due to leave for Tanzania so we had to run the length of the airport to the gate. They has held the flight for us and several other people so fortunately we were able to board. Whilst waiting for the take off Mike stood up to find his trousers covered in chewing gum. The cabin crew were summonsed and spent ten minutes dutifully picking off the gum amidst copious apologies. A complaint form was filled out and in due course he will be contacted about the incident. We were moved to much better seats as a result of this little palaver and on the whole the flight was OK albeit long and very boring. We arrived at Kilimanjaro late and then discovered two of our four bags were not there. More complaints especially when I realised one of the bags was mine. Silvester was there to meet us as usual and brought us up to date on the local gossip. He showed us where our rich neighbour Mr. Minja was killed in an RTA recently. His driver was drunk at the time (not unusual) and overtook on a dangerous stretch and Minja was killed outright. Road kill here is very high. We arrived at Equator Hotel by about 9.30pm and I had to go to bed with no washing things, no nightwear and nothing to change into the following day. I was not amused. Despite several phone calls to the airport no one could tell us when the bags would appear. They eventually did appear at 5.30am on the Friday morning, much to my relief.

The Children

The children were on a semester break so David and Elia came with Catherine to see us on Thursday. They are growing up into delightful young people and Elia is almost becoming sensible these days. It’s a shame in a way but he is still a joy to be around and is still happy to give and receive kisses and cuddles; David is more reserved in that respect bless him. For some reason they wanted to watch Titanic streamed on the laptop so that was them sorted for the day. Catherine was the same old lovely person. She was very keen to update us on the whole registration/licence issue but more of that and water issues later. David and Elia had to return to school on Sunday and due to the slowness of the dala dala transport they and many others arrived late at the school. Later on Sunday night Catherine had a message from her brother to say that they had arrived at their house after 8.00pm in the dark. The bloody school had yet again turned children out onto the street, but this time in the dark, and told to return in the morning. I was so angry. This is the third time they have done something like this and I am not accepting it any longer. We have subsequently got an appointment with the education officer at the Catholic Diocese on Thursday and I intend to have a good deal to say on the matter. They didn’t even have the decency to contact the parents. A total disgrace and the response of the head teacher to my messages was rude and unhelpful – horrid little man he is. We will not be sending the next four there next year and will removed Elia after Form 2 when David leaves after Form 4. Grace leaves this autumn after her form 4 exams so we have to find her somewhere else to go that is affordable. She is still unsure what she wants to do which makes it more difficult to choose the right place for her. David on the other hand is sticking to his guns and wants to work in social welfare so he could go directly to the Institute of Social Welfare and start his training after Form 4. We shall see.

The other children are all as lovely as ever. Catherine says the Goodluck and Mercy can be quite moody and sulky sometimes but I guess that’s normal for their age; they are as thick as thieves and copy each other to some degree. If Mercy has a sulk Goodluck turns on her and tells her that no one will want to marry her if she behaves like that. Pot and kettle I think. Jordan continues to be a bit of a pest; he is still quite babyish despite being 9 now and constantly loses his school books and equipment, which annoys us all. He has a habit of poking and prodding and generally fiddling with us when we are sitting down to have conversations which I find distinctly irritating. Joshua is a delight. He has now turned 7and is progressing well at school. The only concern is his poor speech and reading but I think he will be fine and I saw no evidence of much to worry about. When we arrived on the Friday they were all hard at it doing revision for the upcoming exams and I am so impressed by the general approach to education and learning in our house. Mike ended up doing some sort of osmosis experiment with a potato and salt and I got a lesson on the excretory system from Goodie.

We had brought a large box of marbles amongst other things and they devised quite a clever pool table using a table and books. They had large broom handles as cues and played a mean game of pool using the marbles. They are a resourceful bunch. Mercy has continued to develop her solar skills so everyone has little lights in their rooms. And all made from rubbish collected around and about. Amazing and very clever. Joram is our little farmer. Catherine has now allowed him to climb to the very top of our avocado tree, which is high, to bring down the fruit and is also able to shin up tall banana palms. He has virtual full charge of the hens and is growing vegetable in his own patch of garden. He is a quiet child but they can’t all be noisy lunatics thank goodness.

The Staff

Mama Teddy is now back at work with her new baby, Elkana. He is exactly the same age as our Jacob but 2kg lighter. I can’t help but think back to little baby Andrew and his untimely death and hope to goodness that nothing like that happens again. Anna has taken drastic measures so far as her relationship with Festo goes but I don’t think it would be fair to go into the details here. She is desperate for a baby of her own and Festo shows no sign of moving things forward in terms of marriage so Anna is taking matters into her own hands – I think she may have listened to past advice from myself and Catherine so we shall see. We will support her whatever the outcome and we certainly do not want to lose her and I don’t think she would want to leave us. One idea has sprung into my mind. The extra piece of land that we have our eye on could well be purchased next visit. My brainwave was to then build a very small, simple house for Anna and Festo which they would have rent-free. This would be an asset for the charity and could solve the problem of hanging on to Anna. When we wafted the idea around, Anna almost became animated and had to be fanned by Catherine to calm her down. She can’t believe we would do that. I have told her that in the meanwhile if she feels she has to take a room nearby she must go ahead as this isn’t going to happen overnight. The little house would really be basic – just two rooms and an outside loo for night use. Water would come from Usalama House and Anna would continue to take her meals there as she does now. Hopefully Festo wouldn’t be around very much – he works in Dar and shows no signs of moving to Arusha – so we would all be happy and we would keep our Anna plus any baby she might somehow magically acquire!!

Catherine continues to weave her magic at the house. She has had a very tough time with Social Welfare and officialdom in general but manages to keep smiling. We desperately need to get all this nonsense sorted so she can clear her mind and just get on with caring for the children. She is clearly quite stressed with it all and I don’t want to add to her stress if possible. She is so lovely and so kind and gentle with the children and they adore her. When Elia left for school he reduced her to tears by giving her a note telling her how much he loves her and misses her when he is away. We do have to be a bit careful not to discuss too many worries in front of him – he understands English pretty well and has picked up on our concerns. He told Catherine that if they try to close us down he will follow her wherever she goes and failing that he will come to the UK with us. Over my dead body is anyone going to do anything to change our delightful set up. I will go to court if needs be.

Ephemera

There was a shocking road accident before we arrived. 32 children were killed in a bus accident whilst on their way to a school competition. That in itself is shocking but what I found more shocking was the fact that pictures were displayed on Facebook of the aftermath of the accident with death and destruction all around and yet more pictures were shown of the children in their coffins and a mass gathering at the local football stadium prior to their various funeral. All in quite bad taste in our terms but quite normal behaviour here. Apparently two American tourists happened to be passing the site of the accident at the time and waded in to help. They then took two badly injured children plus their mothers to the US to get their injuries attended to. Such kindness.

There has been a spate of kidnapping of children. Some are taken as slaves and others have had their heads chopping off when the parents can’t or won’t pay ransoms. All very delightful.

Our dog Charlie apparently took a dislike, and I can’t say I blame him, and tried to chase away visiting social welfare officers who were extremely annoyed. Go Charlie, go.

The President of this country, Mr. Magufuli, has pronounced that a wall has to build around the Tanzanite mine near Kilimanjaro airport. He has warned that if anyone tries to smuggle out stones from the mine they will be caught even if they swallow the stones. He appeared at the local stadium last week and waffled on ad nauseum about how he would improve the country. He is going to hard and too fast and basically frightening people and paralysing small business. He needs to be gone.

The road to the airport is now much improved. The problem is that very few here know how to drive safely and correctly so dual carriageways are now a complete free for all; this includes people driving the wrong way up the carriageways. Thank goodness our Silvester is a very safe and careful driver.

**Monday September 18th**

I have been really struggling to keep any sort of record of this visit so far. It has been packed with problems and various happenings and is proving to be challenging in terms of my patience, my money and my sanity. I cannot believe how crass and stupid, beaurocracy and officialdom is in this place. I have been astounded by the inflexibility of rules and regulations and how things that to me are glaringly obvious seem to escape the brains of most people.

On top of all this today my hip has been giving me a rough time. I must have trapped a nerve somewhere – constant electric shocks coming from the hip area and shooting down into my groin have worn me down and made me very short tempered and exhausted this evening. I am treating it with hot water bottles and chocolate cake and hopefully it will improve overnight. Tomorrow we can at least take it easy as we only have one appointment and that is later in the day so I plan to sleep in and try to clear my head of a lot of rubbish. I wish I had a trash can icon to press.

Today Mike and I dashed to town to exchange money to pay for the drainage work that Wilson is going to start on tomorrow. Catherine and Wilson appeared at 10am. They had their chai and Wilson remembered more items he needed for the work thus bumping up costs even more. Two steps forward and one back is the way things are at the moment. Patrick (manager) sent complimentary soup for them – quite why they would want soup at that time beats me but they slurped it with relish. We had another general rant about the incident at school and I was further enraged by discovering that recently a new money making scheme has emerged. People are kidnapping random children and demanding ransoms for them. These ransoms only involve relatively small amounts of money but if the parents can’t pay the children are beheaded. One such incident happened in August in this area. Even more reason for not chucking our kids or anyone else’s kids out on the streets for perceived crimes such as lateness. Horrific. I have emailed the Catholic Diocese for an appointment to see someone about the school but if I do not get a reply I shall be going and banging on their door. I am not going to accept this practice any longer. We are trying to do our level best to care for our kids, classified as vulnerable, and then the stupid bloody school throws them on the street. NOT GOOD ENOUGH!!

I am aware that if I am not careful this diary will simply turn into a total rant. So I will try to be a bit more positive. After Wilson had gone off to get the stuff for the building work Mr. Christopher arrived. He was the senior social worker that we dealt with but was promoted to a different role about 18 months ago. He is currently on sabbatical but we are unsure what is going on at the DC with him and he was evasive when I tried to question his current situation. Anyway, we talked to him about the current problems with getting our licence due to the ridiculous demands the government is placing on organisations caring for children. We are supposed to have and pay for a social worker and a nurse full time in the house. This is not possible or necessary or affordable and we are trying to find ways around this issue which could be a show stopper if we can’t find solutions. When I try to explain to the welfare officers our problems they say simply that there isn’t a problem: do it or close and we will take away the children. Over my dead body. Where is the care for the psychological welfare of children in that attitude?

Mr. C was initially carrying on in the same vein, saying that we had to comply or else. However, after he had reduced me to tears with Catherine following suit he then announced that he might have a solution. I had disappeared during this announcement to have a good cry and a much-needed ciggie. He has offered to state that he will act as our social worker; he will not charge for this service, although if we want to give him something that is up to us. The only condition is that Catherine must show him all her reports before she submits them to the Welfare department on a three monthly basis. I hope that this shortcut will be accepted by the authorities and that we don’t all end up in trouble. We have already got a similar arrangement with a nurse who is local to our house and that hasn’t been questioned so hopefully this will solve the problem. It is a wonderful gesture by Mr. C and I have had to revise my opinion of him somewhat. He has always been very officious and straight-laced but I think he genuinely admires Catherine and the standards that we uphold at Usalama House. Phew, what a relief (I hope).

We then toddled off to see Mama Grace at Maasai market. My hip was giving me real jip and what with the emotional strain of the visit so far plus the pain I was not in the best of places by the time we got there. We had our chipsi mayai for lunch and sorted out what I needed to buy from her and what she would need to order for next week. Two very strange women appeared in the shop whilst we were there. The second one proceeded to shout and yell at us at the top of her voice about how she hated orphanages, how she was sick of Tanzania and Tanzanians and generally upset me and everyone within earshot. I was ready to punch her and Catherine’s face was a picture. She eventually quietened down and I was able to say a few things to her calmly without smacking her round the chops and I hope she listened to what I had to say. She has obviously got issues but ranting on in such derogatory terms won’t change anything. Mike had a long chat with some of the other stall holders about the current political situation here. They all seemed to think that the President was correct to be cracking down on tax, corruption etc. but that he was trying to do things too quickly which is causing the economy and people many problems. He is certainly causing us problems. By the end of that encounter I really had had enough so Mama Grace called a bajaji to take us back. This is a little three-wheeled vehicle like an Indian Tuk Tuk and we chugged back to the hotel and Catherine chugged back to Sanawari to go home.

**Tuesday September 19th**

My hip seemed a lot better today but we didn’t test it very much. Catherine came here at about 11 am and we waded our way through the mountains of paperwork we have to photocopy for the authorities. We have an appointment with Social Welfare so we are trying to get everything ready for this meeting. She had handwritten a letter of introduction as requested, but when she submitted it, it wasn’t accepted as it had to be typed and printed. For goodness sake!! So I typed out the letter in Swahili – the address took up more than half the letter. All very weird. But when I took it to Patrick to print out, all the words came out in a string with no spacing so I will have to try again somewhere else. A compatibility issue I guess. We continued to go round in circles as we tried to chew our way through the whole problem of registration, organisational issues and issues of ownership. We are slowly driving ourselves insane.

We wandered slowly into town to get stuff photocopied. Of course the power was down yet again so we couldn’t do it. We were accosted by two little boys – street children, asking for money. I will not give them money but decided on this occasion that we would get a little food for them. So they were duly frog-marched into a small café and Catherine did her best to find out why they were on the streets. Who knows whether or not they were telling the truth but the older one was in fact 16 – he looked no more than 11 or 12. They ate their food and then left without a word. We have noticed many more kids on the streets on this visit. They gravitate to Arusha from all over the country – one of the boys said he was from Mwanza which is miles away on the shore of Lake Victoria. He said that the police brought him to Arusha because he told them he was lost and wanted to get to Arusha. The other boy was supposed to hail from Singida – again many miles away. These kids are occasionally gathered up by the authorities and returned to their homes but they simply run away again and return to the streets. I suppose that their circumstances at home are so dire that living on the streets is preferable to a life of abuse and violence at home. So tragic and no one seems to care. There is so much need here and we can’t do anything to help.

We then went to our meeting at Africafe with the women from CCR-TZ – the Caucus for Children’s Rights in Tanzania. This is an influential pressure group set up many years ago by Kate McAlpine to work with government on issues to do with children, violence against women and many other subjects. Kate was instrumental in putting together the original Law of the Child. We wanted to talk with the organisation about possible solutions to our registration problems and to point out some glaring gaps and anomalies in the Law as it currently stands or is currently interpreted. Kate is currently in the UK so we met with a lovely woman called Njeri – a Kenyan lawyer- and her colleague Janis, who looked about 10 but was in fact 23 and a real poppet.

We had a fruitful and helpful discussion with them and they have gone away to look at possible solutions to our registration problems. They agreed that the inflexible and stringent approach of government and local officials is unhelpful and short-sighted. It is all very well to threaten to take away children and thus damage them probably irreparably, but if it did come to that, which it won’t, then what? They also stated that there are huge gaps in the Law of the Child as it stands currently – they said that the child protection issues only apply to children in children’s homes and not for example to our children when they are being chucked out of school for being late, and on the streets after dark. I can’t believe that is actually the case but if so it needs remedying and fast. We are charged with caring for our kids and protecting them from harm but as soon as we pass them over to secondary education the school is at liberty to place them in harm’s way when they feel like it. I have an appointment on Thursday with the Education Officer for the Catholic Diocese which oversees Edmond Rice school and will making some very strong representations to him. I am tired with all this battling but I now have the bit between my teeth and I do not intend to let it drop until something changes.

Njeri came up with a couple of ideas in order to get round the regulations and get the flipping social welfare people off our backs. One solution would be for Catherine to apply to foster at least three of the children – this would reduce the numbers “in care” to four and the regulations don’t apply for such low numbers. The other way would be to split the children into two groups with Anna in charge of one group and Catherine the other. I am not sure how that would work in practice and Anna’s situation is a bit fluid at the moment so it may not be feasible to go ahead with that option. I showed them the video I made with Goodluck and Elia at the weekend and they did not recognise it as an orphanage as they know them. That was the point I explained. We are NOT an orphanage – we are a home-from-home with our children living together with our women as a family. But Njeri will come back to us when she has researched possibilities further – I hope she will be in touch before Friday when we have an appointment with Social Welfare in the afternoon.

So another long and trying day came to an end. This is not the easiest of visits and I resent the amount of time we are having to spend on all this stuff. But at least all the kids are at school all week so we wouldn’t be able to see them anyway. I intend to ensure that the weekend is spent with the children without interruptions from all the nonsensical claptrap we are having to deal with.

**Wednesday 20th, Thursday 21st, Friday 22nd**

Wednesday as far as I remember we stayed put and tried to fathom out our problems and prepare for meeting with Sister Regina – the Catholic Diocesan Education Officer – regarding the issues at Edmond Rice. We needed to relax, be quiet and take some time to assess where we are at right now. Also I think Catherine needed to stay at home and just be normal for a while. She has put so much faith in us being able to sort out problems with school, social welfare and house issues but I am feeling totally impotent as to knowing what to do to help. I skipped breakfast and later on we went down to Africafe for a light lunch – scrambled eggs on toast and we then took a wander to find out where would need to go on Thursday. We eventually managed to find the Diocesan offices and spotted a large building being erected – the new Catholic Cathedral. It is a huge, modern edifice which must be costing a bomb – how this can be justified given the more pressing (in my humble opinion) needs here beats me but who I am I to question?? We wandered back and caught up on some news and did a bit more thinking and I forced myself into the shower for a freshen up. The rain torrented down most of the night and it was chilly enough for my hot water bottle to be brought into service.

We were up bright and early on Thursday morning and we plus Catherine walked down to find the Education Officer. We had to wait nearly an hour past the appointed time but eventually we were ushered up three flights of stairs to her office. She was a pleasant woman and full of her apologies for her lateness – something about large traffic jams because of the Presidential visit to Arusha. Her English was OK but with a strong accent and an echoey room, she was not easy to understand. I related our concerns about Edmund Rice, in particular their nasty habit of turning kids onto the street if they are late back after a break or for any other perceived crime they might have done. Even if it is not their fault, late running of buses, or late payment of fees or underpayment of fees however small or anything else come to that, out they are thrown. We have in the past been promised that this would not happen to our sponsored kids but that was an empty promise. We told Sister Regina that this was a dangerous way to treat the children and that it was tantamount to abuse and she seemed to agree with us. I also told her about the pregnant nun episode from last time and said I didn’t feel that this was setting a very good example to the kids and she was quite shocked to hear about it. She seemed very keen to get rid of us and I had to push her for another appointment so we can receive feedback after she has taken action. So we will see her next Wednesday. She assured us that she would be in touch with the school as soon as possible, but kept telling us how busy she was, thus instilling in our minds doubt as to whether she would actually do anything. Catherine re-emphasised that our concerns were for all the children – not just ours. We said we would like to visit the school to see Grace and she assured us that we should feel comfortable to go there without any problem.

We returned to Equator for a little lunch and decided to go to the school that afternoon. After a lot of confusion over transport we eventually were sent a Bajaji by Mama Grace and we set off to the school. They are not the safest of vehicles, especially in heavy traffic and on bad roads so we have decided to restrict our use of these for very local trips in town. We arrived at about 3.00pm only to find that Grace was in a long mock Chemistry exam and wouldn’t be out until after 5.00pm. The Bajaji driver decided not to wait and said he would be back for us at 5.45pm. Elia appeared and he gave his account of the travel problems of last Sunday. He said they arrived at the school at about 5.45pm whilst it was still light and hung around outside whilst the gate keepers contacted the head teacher. He said it was pretty much dark when they and many others were told they couldn’t come in. His story tallied exactly with David’s version later on. We had a nice chat with Elia and then David appeared and Elia went off to his dorm for a shower before dinner. David had just come from a Physics exam. He was a bit non-committal but seemed to think it was OK. We talked to him about future career choices and educational possibilities after Form 4. Finally Grace emerged from her exam after 5.00pm saying that it was very tough, thus worrying Catherine a bit more. At the same time the wretched head teacher appeared. He promptly accosted Catherine and was really angry that we had gone over his head to the diocese and especially angry that we had mentioned the pregnant nun episode. Mike admonished me to keep quiet and I did my best to do so. He ranted on at Catherine and she fought back but we could see her wilting and I was beginning to boil inside. Suddenly he turned on me and shouted to me in English that my kids were late and it was our fault that they had been put on the street. I lost my rag and squawked rather loudly at him. I said that how dare he speak to Catherine in the manner he was doing, and how dare he shout at me and something about he needed to watch out for his job. At that point I hurriedly left – I was worried that I would clobber the horrid little man with my handbag and was also aware that all the children were standing around with their mouths open watching this performance. Not my proudest hour I have to confess.

I was annoyed with myself for losing my temper but more annoyed that the man seemed to be totally unable to understand our concerns. Rules are rules. Stick to them or else. If you don’t like it leave. Etc.. I waited around outside the school for another half hour and eventually Mike and Catherine appeared. There had been more heated discussions of a similar vein and the horrid man had told Catherine she was to come back alone, without that white woman, to discuss the nun issue. I have told her she will do no such thing as I am not having her bullied by him anymore. I fumed all the way back to Africafe, totally oblivious to the numerous near misses we apparently had with traffic and Catherine then got on a bike to take her home. She was in a state and had a head ache and I’m not surprised. I then sat and wrote emails to the little squirt and also to Sister Regina copying them both in. I detailed in the simplest terms yet again my concerns and told him I would be taking it higher. I told Sister Regina I wanted to see the auxiliary Bishop next week with her and that something has to be done. Late at night I got a very unconcilliatory email response from the nasty man which just has served to annoy me further. I reiterated yet again the issues but they seem to float over his head. As far as he is concerned he is right and that’s the end of it. All very unsatisfactory and upsetting to say the least. The next morning I received a marginally more amiable message from him but still blaming us for all the problems but that he wanted to start afresh and forget it all. I am not prepared to forgive him but for some weird reason he thinks I have done so. Let the silly man labour under his delusions. I am past caring now. I am giving up on ever being able to make anything right here. Children are still treated like second-class citizens regardless of the so called Law of the Child and the numerous regulations supposedly enacted by parliament. It is all just lip service; in reality nothing has changed or show any signs of changing in the foreseeable future.

Today we were supposed to see Mr. Christopher so he could give us a copy of his certificate. Catherine was already on her way down when he messaged me that he wouldn’t be coming as he had a sudden stomach issue. When I asked him when we get the certificate his answer was when he had recovered. Catherine was not amused. She contacted him to ask if she could come and collect it from him and so far, several hours later, there has been no response. He is a slippery character and I have never trusted him so I suspect we are back to square one again. We also had an appointment with Grace at Social Welfare this afternoon to push the application along but, surprise, surprise, she also cancelled due to another urgent appointment. She has also not responded to our replies and requests for another meeting even in the evening. I feel we have let Catherine down by not being able to progress things but the reality is that none of it is our fault. Yet again poor Catherine is going to be left to deal with it all alone which is not nice for her.

On top of all this there are problems with the building work up at the house. The road chairman, who caused the problem with our boundary in the first place is now questioning our plans to put a drainage channel along the roadside to protect the walls from further damage and to shore up our boundary walls. Honestly this country is sooooo annoying. Nothing is straightforward. The only thing I can count on is knowing that somehow or other it will always, but always, end up costing us money. We seem to have to remedy problems that are not of our making on the whim of some idiot or other. On top of that, Mike walked Catherine back up to Sanawari to catch the dala dala home, and on the way they encountered one of our neighbours who proceeded to inform Catherine that our materials for the work are blocking the road so he can’t get his vehicle up. Bloody hell, what else tonight. Go away world, I am closing up shop for the day. Oh – I just remembered that Njeri from CCR-TZ has not got back to us despite several requests. She had said she might catch up with us later today. It is now 6.00pm so I am giving up on that as well. Have I got leprosy or something? I am beginning to get a complex and have totally lost confidence in myself.

Tomorrow we are going early to the house. The children will be at home so maybe we can have a relatively pleasant couple of days with them over the weekend. No doubt something else will crawl out of the woodwork to bite us on our behinds.

**Saturday 23rd & Sunday 24th September**

Being with the children at the weekend has been therapeutic and re-energising. They are such a great bunch and a pleasure to be around (most of the time anyway). Jordan desisted from poking and prodding us – I think he had been warned. He did manage to destroy a new pencil within five minutes of being given it. This resulted in him blubbing for forgiveness for which he was given short shrift by me and by Catherine. He apparently never manages to hang on to a pencil for more than a day; he breaks them, loses them, and eats them or whatever.

Saturday the road committee came to inspect the problem they have caused and agreed we should go ahead and put in drainage and rocks to protect our boundaries. They of course blamed someone else for the problem – no one here ever takes any responsibility for anything. When questioned about the meeting by Mike, in particular what will happen if anyone breaks the new constructions when completed Catherine replied that of course no one will break them – she hesitated for a few seconds and then said unless it was an accident. I felt like strangling her. The builder and his boys were hard at work digging out by hand a tank measuring 8’ x 12’ x 8’ deep. This will be able to hold about 20,000 litres of water which will be mainly collected from the roof. The mound of soil was beginning to look like a mini Kilimanjaro. Then a boy started throwing soil over the wall onto the road; anyone passing by was at real risk of being covered in the stuff. What about health and safety I asked myself – answer is there is no such thing as health and safety around these parts. This tank will be lined with blocks and concrete and covered over for safety purposes. We are considering using it as a grave for any more idiots who choose to upset us, including the President himself. Then a tap will be connected and water can be pumped up and used for the vegetables and for flushing loos etc. during times of water cuts. We will eventually sink a well if it is possible and not too expensive. The problem is that no one knows how deep we would have to go and that could bump up costs. Also if the well diggers hit rock – then dynamite may come into play – more expense plus aspects of dangerousness!!!! We are leaving this for now as we don’t have the money and have too many other things to worry about. We finally got a reply from Mr. Christopher the slippery one, and he said he was happy to continue to support our licence application but would still not giving a straight answer as to when he would deliver to us the paperwork we need. He NEVER answers a straight question with a straight reply. The Social Welfare woman who had cancelled out on Friday finally said she would get back to us when she could find a time to meet before we return home in a weeks’ time. I guess I can forget that one – it isn’t going to happen.

Ismael appeared at lunch time. I swear he can smell food from miles away. He is as lovely as ever. We had quite heated discussions about politics – Catherine and I blame him for the current state of the country. He takes it all in good humour. He showed me where the land that we are thinking about purchasing could be taken back to by the road committee in future, so that will most certainly be taken into account as and when we come to measure up and make an offer. Watch this spot.

We all watched a Blue Planet DVD on the new-ish laptop. The children were fascinated. I ended up in a confusing and complicated discussion about mammals with Ismael and somehow he thought that what were actually dolphins (that he thought of as fish) I had said were bats. Don’t even go there. I was just trying to make a point about mammals and somehow the point was missed altogether. Whatever!! T.I.A. after all. Dominic demonstrated more sleight of hand with his magic tricks – he’s pretty good but I think I have sussed out the latest trick. Mercy and Goodluck practised keepy uppies – Goodluck is good at everything he does be it sport, academic work and anything else. He has told Mike he will be the 6th President of this country – he couldn’t do a worse job than the others for sure. He was originally named Dennis after his father. When he was small he demanded to change his name to Goodluck so he could do better at begging. His mother then changed his name to Bahati (Good Luck in Swahili) and then for some unknown reason to Ramadani – he has reverted to Goodluck since he has been with us. I was even allowed to wash up the lunch plates and cut up pineapple. Catherine keeps an eagle eye on me in case I do anything wrong, but I think I did OK today. Anna refuses to allow me to do anything which is annoying.

So life in the house swings along in a delightful manner – I need to emphasise to everyone and anyone that it is NOT an orphanage – it is a home-from-home and a wonderful one at that. The atmosphere is so relaxed and so loving and it is an absolute pleasure for us to be a part of it. The children are as good as gold most of the time; there is very little quarrelling and everyone deals with everyone else with respect and courtesy. There is a hierarchy in terms of age and therefore status but the younger ones’ time will come and that’s fine. We left them this evening knowing that everyone was happy to go to bed early as Catherine is knackered. Everyone came for goodbye hugs – Mike and I insisted that we were quite capable of getting to the dala dala without escort – the children deserve time off and we made it back without incident.

Only a week left – I just hope we don’t have to waste too much more time waiting for people who don’t show up and listening to lame excuses from authorities who are too stupid to do anything properly. Harsh – well maybe – true – pretty much – come here and try it for yourselves – believe me you will be as mad as I am by the end of it. Lala salama everyone.

**Monday 25th & Tuesday 26th September**

Monday was yet another frustrating day waiting around for someone to show up who didn’t show up. He did not reply to messages and I think we have to kick him into touch as he is slippery and unreliable and has messed me around too many times before. Catherine came down in the afternoon and we exchanged some money, sorted Mike’s phone papers out, yet again, and got a load of photocopying done. We then had a quick hot chocolate in Africafe – Catherine has developed a distinct penchant for the stuff. I will bring her a tin of chocolate powder from the UK next time I come. I watched “The Queen of Katwe” in the evening. Do watch it if you haven’t seen it already; it is a wonderful and uplifting movie and well worth a look at. Today (Tuesday) we met Catherine at Sanawari – as usual Julieth was running late so we had a soda in a local café. We seem to spend a lot of time sitting in cafes drinking tea, soda etc. We piled onto a dala dala and met up with Julieth at the roadside. We meandered our way to Ebeneser and sat and talked for ages. Chips and roasted banana for lunch was very welcome. Julieth continues to amaze me. She has three children of her own now and wants one more. She also now has 20 children she cares for. I really don’t know how she does it. She has managed to get her licence delayed until she finishes building the new place at Magi ya Chai where she lives. When it is all complete she will move the whole shebang there which will make life much easier for her. She may have come up with a solution to our licencing problem and tomorrow we are going together to meet someone who hopefully can help us out. It would be great if it was all sorted out before we leave but I am not holding my breath; too many let-downs and disappointments this trip have left me somewhat deflated and very cynical. This has not been the best of trips and I am pretty much ready to go home to relative normality is there is such a thing.

Julieth has become so much more organised and mature these days. She is a wonderful mother and a good friend. She deserves all the help she gets from her many volunteers. I wish we could have volunteers more often at our place but we seem to be a bit far from the main road for most of the volunteer agencies. It’s a shame as Catherine could do with help with the children in the holidays and volunteers frequently bring in much needed resources. We will struggle next year to send the next four children to good private secondary schools unless we can achieve more funding. We are trying to research decent state schools and Catherine has got to continue to look into school matters when we have left. Grace needs a new school for her A-Level course; she refuses to continue at Edmund Rice and I think she is right. I would like to move Elia from there in January if we can find somewhere better for him; the problem is that David only has one more year before O-Levels so we have to let him continue there for one more year. I feel very let down by that school; the head master is horrible and the school’s position in the league tables is falling. There are some excellent schools around but without money we can’t use them. If anyone can help us with the education funding do please let me know. The kids deserve the best we can give them.

**Wednesday 27th September**

We actually managed to all get ourselves in the right places at the right times – a miracle has happened. Julieth proudly messaged me that she was at Sanawari early – 40 minutes early in fact. This is unheard of but Julieth said that this was because it was so important she had to be on time. So I suggested that we were also important so she should be on time when we meet, but her response was that I am her Mum so it doesn’t matter. She is a complete nightmare but I love her – she is my African daughter and she shares the same birthday as my UK daughter. So the two girls managed to find the right taxi and then remembered to pick us up on the way and we arrived at the Samaritan Village to meet with Josphat half an hour early. The place was established in the early nineties and now takes 50 + orphaned and “Dumped” children. After our meeting we were shown round. It is pretty impressive but very sad at the same time. We were taken to the unit for 0-5 ‘s and saw several tiny toddlers all toddling around – they had no toys to play with that I could see. The bedrooms each had 5 or 6 cots for the babies and nothing else in the rooms at all. Very institutional but I suppose these kids would be dead had not the Village and many others like it taken them in. The staff we met were very kind people and dedicated to their jobs which is good to see. But I am even more convinced that our home-from-home approach is correct. Small is beautiful. Our children are anything but institutionalised and should become well-rounded and balanced adults. It is an expensive way of caring for children and we can only care for a few but a few is better than none at all. So we continue.

Back to the meeting. At last we were able to talk to someone who clearly knows the ropes and has worked out ways of meeting the government requirements without it costing an arm and a leg. So, with baited breath we are now waiting for news that the final piece in the puzzle can be put in place. I can’t go into all the ins and outs here; suffice to say that government has made life so hard for people caring for children – a job that government should be doing but doesn’t – that ways have to be found that are not entirely straightforward and easy. On top of that Josphat explained that the Social Welfare Officers are still as corrupt as ever and were probably waiting for us to bribe them so we could achieve the licence. Nothing changing there it seems. Hopefully we will hear tonight or tomorrow what has happened. It would be lovely to leave early Monday knowing that at least that issue is sorted out, at least for now. We have everything crossed this evening and I am waiting by the phone for news.

We walked to the road and caught a dala dala which dropped us right by Maasai market to catch up again with Mama Grace. On the bus a lady tried to sit down next to Catherine and Julieth but she couldn’t squeeze in. She was quite a petite lady but all sorts of mutterings about large bottoms and “’ips” were going on. As I tried to get off at our stop, Julieth and Catherine were whacking me on the backside and hauling my trousers up so no one could see my pants. Great guffaws all round – no respect those two. We went to the café in the market for lunch. Three portions of Chipsi Mayai and four soda cost TSh10,000/- which is about three quid in our money. Sooo cheap and very delicious. After food Julieth refused to allow Mike to go alone to exchange money and get phone credit so she escorted him whilst I proceeded to finish my purchasing. Mama Grace has some wonderful new stock including small, medium and large fabric elephants that are totally gorgeous and cute. We splashed out on some more expensive items so hopefully they will sell well at X-Mas. I might put some up on the website and on Facebook if I get a moment to do it.

Julieth got a call from her home. Her youngest Jennifer who is around 7/8 months had refused to eat or drink anything all day. So Julieth had to get going to get home to feed her – she is only partly weaned and clearly was missing Mum’s breast. We hope to see her again before we go but it is a long way to come. Mike decided he’s had enough sitting around so walked back to the hotel. Mama Grace and Catherine wrapped everything up ready to be packed and then I came back with all the goodies and Catherine caught a dala dala to go back home. Mama Grace will deliver a few missing items on Sunday morning before we leave. So, overall today has been a much better day and we are all in better spirits than up until now. Poor Catherine has found it all very worrying but she seems definitely more relaxed now. I still can’t totally relax but with everything x’d maybe I will sleep better tonight.

**Thursday 28th, Friday 29th Saturday 30th September**

This visit has totally driven me to distraction one way and another. If I hear one more word about water, Education, Social Welfare, Education or anything else that might vaguely drive me insane I swear I shall scream. I am writing this on Sunday morning – we leave at 3am Monday morning for the airport and I shall be very relieved to get home to relative sanity. Thursday we went up to the house. Catherine had heard from Josephat that morning – he has finally managed to find us a social worker who will help us out without having to pay an arm and a leg. I shall believe it when I see it but it’s maybe progress. We decided to cancel our appointment with Social Welfare for Friday. The woman has been anything but helpful and I wonder if she was waiting for a bribe in order to move things forward but if she was she is in for a long wait. We do not bribe – it is a policy of the charity and we are sticking to it. So Catherine will now have to deal with it with the help of Josephat and hopefully the licence will happen at some point. Maybe it will still be up in the air when we return in the New Year; who knows and right now who cares.

The drainage/water storage work is well under way. It seems to me that we either have too much water or too little water. The huge storage chamber should hold about 25,000 litres mainly collected from the roof when it rains. However, Catherine will keep it full from the mains supply so when it rains the water from the roof will go into the tank and then straight out through the overflow and through the wall into the drainage channel outside the house. Rather defeats the purpose in my book but who am I to question the logic of people here? The channel has been reinforced with concrete to protect our walls and the water will then flow into a culvert which will send the water on down the road just after our house. Protecting the wall is a must but the force of water running down during the rains will turn the road lower down into a quagmire. As for drilling wells – that is going to be put on the back burner for now – the work we have had to do has cost more money than I had expected so any other work will just have to wait.

We spent a bit of time making movies with Catherine. I need to give various presentations in the near future and so we did a conducted tour of the house and also a short interview about education. Catherine really warmed to the task and it was fun doing it. The quality is not particularly good but I can hopefully edit the footage, if I ever get time to do so, and produce something informative and worth watching. We were allowed to take ourselves back to the dala dala minus escort. The little ones were home early but the older kids rarely get back before 5pm. We ran into Joram on the way. He is really blossoming now.

Friday we stayed in town and relaxed for a change. We did lots of shopping for party food, courtesy of Julian, for our leaving party on Saturday and generally chilled out.

Saturday we took the car up to the house laden down with party stuff. The children had requested sandwiches, crisps and cake etc so that is what we got. We also got them a new football. All was peaceful when we arrived. Jordan and Aron were jumping around in the mounds of soil being dug out for the drainage and were filthy. We had to jump the ditch to get into the house. The chamber has now got the concrete cover over it. We had various complicated discussions about how the water gets in, how the overflow gets out and where the tap with pump will go. Wilson (builder) had underestimated the materials so more costs had to be added annoyingly.

I had previously sent the head teacher of Goodwill School a snotty What’s App asking what had happened to his promise to get the leaving certificates for David and Elia sorted out. I told him I was very disappointed but that maybe he would surprise me at the last minute. I was just about to start preparing the sandwiches when we heard a vehicle getting stuck in the soil. Lo and behold Mr. Mbise appeared saying he wanted to surprise me. Boy, does that man pong. He is the pongiest person I know. He has always ponged and continues to pong. He was super-pongy today. He is a very good head master and full of enthusiasm; he loves to share his knowledge of all things technical and we had to all sit next to him to look at his tablet whilst he showed us various websites related to our education problems. He has come up with possibilities regarding Elia’s change of school and even for Grace. He will be in touch with Catherine who will go and look at schools quickly. He will also help us next year to find places for the four kids who will finish at Primary at the end of 2018. I have told Catherine that sorting the schools out is now the number one priority and she says she will do it.

Suddenly Mr. Mbise said he had to make a quick call but that he would be back. I went to ask Anna and Teddy to start sandwich making. I felt bad because I wanted to do it and relieve them of the job for the day but hadn’t factored in the Mbise appearance. Neither had I factored in what happened next. I was summoned by Catherine to the porch because two men had appeared (obviously a subterfuge with Mr. Mbise), who wanted to talk about Johanes. I was not pleased and started by being quite annoyed. The main man it turned out was the head of one of the Maasai clans in the area. He wanted to hear from us the story of Johanes, who is regularly seen wandering the streets all day and not going to school. He was worried that he had annoyed me so I explained that the stresses of this visit had taken their toll and I was on a very short fuse. So, as far as I can ascertain he wanted to hear from our side what had happened last year with Johanes. We filled him in on all the gruesome details and Catherine showed him the paperwork. It was clear that Johanes’ Bibi had not been transparent and the man was truly shocked and surprised to hear our story. The Maasai seem to act as social workers for their various clans and wanted to try to sort Johanes out in some way or another. They and we are concerned about where all this might lead but equally we no longer have day to day responsibility for him. If he won’t go to school and certainly his ancient and demented Bibi is in no position to enforce anything, then they have to find another solution. I wish them luck. Poor Johanes – he had such a good start with us and seems to have thrown it all away; all very sad.

After they had finally gone and Mbise had gone (the certificates were wrong by the way – “living” instead of “leaving” and “Daves” instead of “David”) we manged to get our sandwich party under way. The children just love sandwiches and all the rest of it and stuffed their faces until they were all full to burst. They then wanted to watch videos so Mike managed to find some discs that actually played on the laptop. Teddy went home so we said our farewells for this visit. Her little Elkana had taken a shine to Mike and even started smiling and laughing at me. He is a little sweetie and I hope to God nothing bad happens to him like his brother Andrew who died at 7 months last May 2016.

More water discussions concerning the down pipes from the roof took place. Sometimes solutions cannot be found without a little creative thinking but again I now have left it to Catherine to ponder on with Wilson. We sat together with Catherine and Anna – I wanted to confirm that Anna had no intention of leaving us as and when she gets married or has a baby in whichever order things happen. She was absolutely clear that she wanted to stay much to our relief and Catherine’s relief. She is an integral part of Usalama House and I for one would do anything to keep her. She is brilliant.

So the day came to its end. We said our farewells to everyone and Mercy and Joram accompanied us part of the way to the dala dala. Mercy will come tomorrow with Goodluck and Catherine after church and we will treat them to a nice lunch. We have to leave the hotel at 3.00am Monday morning for our flight to Nairobi and then onwards to Amsterdam and Birmingham. So we will pack and try and get some sleep before we leave. I trust Silvester will remember to collect us at the right time. I will text him later to remind him before I hand over my local phone to Catherine.

This visit can only be described as chaotic, stressful, frustrating and annoying. I do wander what on earth has to happen here in Tanzania in order for people to become more effective, efficient and transparent. The country has so much going for it but government after government gets it wrong and everything just goes around and around in ever-decreasing circles. Beaurocracy in these parts is unbelievable and so-called professional people act like total fools and seem unable to function without needed to be threatening and obstructive. We and many others are doing the job that government should be doing and yet government, nationally and locally, seem to relish in making life as difficult and as expensive as possible for well-meaning people such as ourselves and others.

T.I.A. yet again. I really hope that subsequent visits are easier than this one – I can’t take too much more of all this chaos and I feel like our time with the family has been spoilt by everything else that has been happening. We see less and less of the children as they get older and spend more time at school and they are the main reason for being here. Time will fade the horrors of this trip and no doubt we will gird our loins and dive headlong back into the fray in due course but right now as I write these final words, I would prefer to never have to set foot on Tanzanian soil ever again.