Diary January/February 2018

**Saturday January 27th**

Well we got here on the right day and at the right time. I had confused everyone by telling them we were arriving on Friday and that we were leaving on Sunday 11th not Monday 12th. I think we are straight now. Too much to think about and the old brain is a bit more addled as time moves along.

Anyway – the journey out was more tiring than usual as we had to drive to Heathrow rather than to Birmingham due to the prohibitive cost of flights from Birmingham. Then a very cramped overnight flight and a couple of hours stopover in Nairobi and we finally arrived at Kilimanjaro at about 8.45am. We chatted for a few minutes in Nairobi to a lovely young guy from the Czech Republic who has been spending a lot of time doing documentaries in the large Nairobi slum. We nearly didn’t get to the right plane as no one had bothered to tell us about a gate change until we overheard a guy, a nephrologist, being told he was in the wrong place so luckily we made it to the right place in time. TIA.

We arrived and so did ALL our bags for once. I had packed sets of underwear in all four bags plus hand luggage so no chance of running out. Silvester was there to meet us in his very smart cowboy hat. He really is a delightful man and very scrummy to the female eye – mine in particular. He caught us up with various bits of local gossip and we got to Equator Hotel without incident at about 10.30am. At this point it was pretty hot and humid but as the day wore on the clouds massed and we have had a massive thunderstorm with a lot more to come I think. Poor Catherine arrived at about 11.30 am to greet us and then had to leave at about 4.15 with more heavy rain threatened and ominous rumblings in the distance. Mike leant her his waterproof to give her at least some protection from the worst of the rain.

Catherine has brought us up to date with the various goings on up at Usalama house. Anna has now moved to her own two roomed place, rented by her boyfriend. I am not overly happy with this event but Grace is around until May and then David will be around for several months when he finishes Form 4 so she will have them there at night. She assures me that in the unlikely event of something serious happening during the night, she can call either Teddy or Anna and they will come straight to the house. So fingers crossed that this plan works out OK. Anna’s youngest sister is in a very bad way. She has produced 7 children over a few years and her erstwhile husband has “gone mental” and abandoned ship. The sister is not coping at all and is more or less destitute so all the children have been farmed out to various relations and Anna has now got the care of the youngest girl aged about 5. All grist to the mill.

At New Year Aron fell over and managed to cut his top lip from inside the nostril down to the lip itself. So he ended up having stitches. He is already quite self-conscious about his mouth area due to his toothy issues so this won’t help. Then poor Joram got attacked seriously by a swarm of hostile bees. He just happened to be walking past a tree that some man was bringing down. He had disturbed the nest and was getting attacked as he tried to get down the tree. Then the bees turned on poor Joram. No one helped him as they were afraid of the bees but luckily a relative of Elia’s came to the rescue. He bundled him indoors, stripped off his clothing and proceeded to cover him in mud to try to stop an allergic reaction. He also removed as many stings as possible. He took him home whereupon he was made to drink a ½ litre of Milk??? He was then taken to see Dr. Patalia who injected him, presumably with antihistamine and by the next day he was OK again. Not a nice thing to happen.

Charlie the dog has disgraced himself. Kids apparently habitually bang on our gate as they go past. On this occasion Jordan thought it was our lot coming back from school and opened the gate without checking first. Charlie escaped and somehow or another an innocent child passing by got bitten – not seriously but again not a helpful happening. Catherine did her first aid and the child went home. Soon an irate and somewhat OTT mother of said child appeared and demanded hospital treatment and transport costs etc. Charlie has all his inoculations and paperwork to prove it but the wretched woman, a known troublemaker was having none of it, so Catherine capitulated for the sake of peace and quiet and Charlie’s life. Never a dull moment it would seem.

Apparently Johanes appeared on Christmas day an invited himself for the Christmas meal. He was allowed to stay and everyone was very friendly. Catherine explained to him that he was no longer a resident so could not just wander around the house at will that but he was now a guest and should behave like one. She said he was very thin. David and Elia tried to talk to him in the garden and Johanes complained about how hard his life is now. The boys pointed out to him that this was his choice. He is still not attending school and the whole thing is really tragic.

The underground water storage has still to be completed so we will try and get that finished this time. Negotiations will start in serious for the land to be known as Harry’s Shamba, on Tuesday. We have a plan of action to try and ensure we get it at a fair price so watch this spot. Needless to say there is still no sign of any licence despite all the paperwork being submitted and with Social Welfare. They are a useless bunch of beaurocrats who couldn’t organise playtime in a nursery. But we are no longer worried as we know we are OK and they jolly well know the same. I am certainly not going to get stressed again about all that nonsense.

Grace is still waiting for her equivalent of O-level results due any day now. Then we can start to make more sense of where she will go for Forms 5 and 6. David is coming up to a critical time also as are Mercy, Aron, Dominic and Goodluck. November 2018 should be interesting to say the least.

We are here for just over two weeks. The second week is going to be different. Catherine, Anna and teddy are having to go on yet another course run by Social Welfare. This course will be run for two weeks. Poor Grace will be left in charge of the house and Catherine wants us to put in a few appearances on the course to see what is going on a possibly stick my oar in, politely if possible. This course is a mandatory government course but we are the ones that have to pay for it. A bit rich given that we and many like us are doing the job that the government should be doing; namely caring for orphaned kids. They then expect us to pay through the nose for it.

So now, we are about to go to bed – we are both getting a bit long in the tooth for this whizzing about the world but we will recover. We are up to the house tomorrow. Apparently the road up is virtually impassable due to some road scheme or other and with torrential rain it is just nightmarish. TIA.

**Sunday January 28th**

Up to the house we went this morning laden down with two large bags stuffed full of various goodies and necessities for the household. The road to the house from Sanawari is virtually impassable due to some major, although probably useless, reconstruction so we had to via a very circuitous route. We were greeted by Dominic at the gate – his first words to use were “Where is Harry”. He was of course referring to wonderful harry Lynch who has raised around £5,000 pounds for the charity by walking well over 500 miles from Felixstowe to Perth at the end of last year. Catherine has been telling the kids about the whole escapade and following it all online. We all hope Harry will eventually visit us in Tanzania to see the product of his labours – namely Harry’s Shamba (land). We have now agreed the price for the land and the deal will be completed on Tuesday when we sign the paperwork and hand over millions of Tanzanian shillings. We will need a suitcase to transport it all up to the house. This extra land will enable us to become increasingly self-sufficient in fruit and veg over time and is also a good investment should times become hard financially. So a massive thank you to our lovely Harry. He is indeed a star.

Anna is the same old Anna – she has now moved out but seems to be omnipresent so nothing too serious has changed there. Aron’s lip area is quite badly damaged but hopefully the scar will fade

over time. Joram doesn’t seem to have been scarred mentally after the horrendous bee attack. He reckons that he had over forty stings. The kind man that rescued him also got stung badly at the same time and ended up also going to hospital so I have asked Catherine to give a little money to cover his hospital costs; he is extremely poor. Nasty aggressive African bees; we will show them a shedload more respect if we encounter any in future. Grace is looking incredibly grown up; as she said herself she is now a woman and is very womanly woman. Mercy is now a woman, I am reliably informed, but this is top secret and it doesn’t appear to have changed her into less of a tom boy than she was before. I am not supposed to know about this but of course Catherine and Grace have kept me informed, so they will be in a lot of trouble when Mercy realises that I am in the know. Family life is entertaining.

The big news from their point of view is that they now have TV. Despite my insistence that they would NOT have TV, one has miraculously appeared as a gift to the house from Catherine’s brother. I am not very pleased but Catherine promises me that they only watch it on Sunday evening and they only have the news and one channel to look at. I suppose I was a bit Canute-like trying to hold back the waves and was about as successful as he was. I like to think of myself as being in charge but the truth is that I am not at all in charge. I can try to advise and try to bring my influence to bear where possible but I am not there on a regular basis and have to allow them to get on with things. I muttered darkly about who do they think is paying the bills, but that seemed to fall on deaf ears. If Johanes gets to hear about the TV no doubt he will try to return to the family but I’m afraid he’s burnt his bridges.

Ismael appeared at lunchtime. I think he has radar where food is concerned. He is a lovely man. We talked about the land issue and it seemed to us that he had more or less agreed the price in our absence and was very clear that if we tried to beat them down further we would risk losing it altogether. I think he is being straight about it and has done his best for us so we will go with what has been agreed. He contacted the vendor who appeared. She is the eldest daughter of ex-Chairman Eliza and a likeable person. She was absolutely clear that she could not drop any further in price so we shook hands and agreed to meet on Tuesday with the paperwork, the money and the village Chairman to complete the deal. Her husband appeared later and tried to jack up the price. I got a little cross and told him he could take his land back and that I was not the right person to play games with and that we had already agreed and shaken on the deal. He capitulated. I do find it hard to trust anyone over here even after ten years. Everyone is so keen to take advantage of everyone else and it makes we wary and perhaps prone to over reacting to some people on some occasions.

So that is that. One problem sorted but no doubt more to solve in the fullness of time. We are all waiting with hearts in mouths for Grace’s form 4 results due any day now. She has explained to me very complicated system by which she could get sent to one of three schools for A-Level depending on various combinations and averages. I won’t attempt to explain it here and now – it’s really in the lap of the Gods as to what happens – the one major concern is that she does well in subjects she doesn’t want to actually do and gets sent to a school in Iringa, which is hundreds of miles away. We shall see. We still have to decide about what to do with the next four but that is a work in progress.

We eventually managed to get a dala dala back to the main road and walked down to Africafe for supper and cake as a mini celebration of our land deal. The weather was lovely to day. A little thunder was around but it stayed dry and beautifully warm so no complaints for a change. Tomorrow is a money day and maybe visit to Mama Grace at Maasai Market.

I forgot to mention – Butu the cat now has his smart new flea collar and Charlie was sweet when I went to say hi to him. All the other kids are fine.

**Monday 29th January**

Today was really hot and humid again. The storm clouds massed over Mount Meru but it didn’t turn out to be anything too dreadful thank goodness. Just hot and sweaty moving around town.

Catherine and grace arrived after a nightmare trip on the daladala which took them miles out of their way to avoid the chaos of the road down to the main road. Grace is like a cat on a hot tin roof worrying about her results which are still not out. She has set up the app on my phone so I can check for her every morning – she wants to look at them first so I will just have to contain myself and wait until she has seen them. Anxious times again in the lives of our various kids.

We eventually made our way to the exchange bureau and got a good rate. We exchanged thousands of pounds to pay for land, school fees and salaries so Grace escorted Mike back to the hotel to deposit the main amount in the safe. Meanwhile Catherine and I went to the bank to attempt to pay school fees. The queues were ridiculous and we gave up totally when the internet went down. It drives me nuts. We would never tolerate such slow service in the UK but I keep telling myself that there is absolutely no point whatsoever in comparing one with the other; it just gets me irate and is a pointless waste of my energy. So we decided to head down to Maasai Market to see Mama Grace and have lunch. Mama Grace was as lovely as ever. She wants to get Harry a small gift to show her appreciation of his wonderful fundraising efforts bless her. We had a very cheap lunch – Catherine had a massive meal which cost less than £1.00. The total for three meals and five sodas was just over £3.00. We managed to get through the order for Grace reasonably smoothly and relatively quickly – I think we are getting better organised and I am well prepared before we go, which certainly speeds everything up.

When we had finished, Catherine and Grace headed home via the market and Mike and I walked back up to the hotel. I looked into the bank and the queues were as long as before but some woman grabbed me and put me in the so-called fast track line. So I only had to stand for about an hour!! I got chatting to a man and a woman also in the “Fast track” queue and I ended up calling their president a total fool which went down like a lead balloon. You are allowed to think it but saying it is not to be advised it would seem. Finally I got to the cashier who proceeded to annoy me intensely so I got rather irate with him and told him not to play his stupid beaurocratic games with me. He then sulked a lot but got on with it and finally I escaped in a lather. Mike had gone on back to the hotel and I decamped to Africafe for a large pot of tea and a muffin to calm myself down.

Patrick arrived at about 6.15pm and was the same old Patrick. We have known him for 11 years now and have seen him grow from a young lad into a man. But he is still highly comical and we always have a laugh about the various incidents that peppered our first month in Tanzania in 2007. He is going to try and arrange a short trip away for us next week – I don’t want to spend a whole week attending the wretched course with Catherine. I know I will get angry and probably end up in an argument with the National Commissioner for Social Welfare thereby embarrassing Catherine and Anna and doing my blood pressure no favours in the meanwhile. He will contact us in the next couple of days to tell us what he has come up with. Mike had dinner – I wasn’t hungry so went straight to the shower. I am now going to read my book and prepare myself for another day in the mad country.

**Tuesday 30th January**

What a day of ups and downs. A real metaphor for life is our life in Tanzania. We overslept but then had to wait for hours for a car to take us up to the house. I checked the government results website first thing and the results of Form 4 were not out. Then I checked again and the site was flashing red. The results were out but then the site crashed so I couldn’t check for Grace. I phoned Catherine – Grace was on the floor in floods so we had to assume this was not good news.

Finally the car arrived and we eventually made it up to the house with our hearts in our mouths plus £3,500 in the rucksack in wads of shillings. I dashed in and it was all very quiet. Along I went to find them – Grace was in a heap on the floor and Catherine was doing her best to console her and remain strong. I will not now go into the whys and wherefores of the ridiculous Tanzanian education system but I am gradually getting a handle on how the whole thing works or indeed doesn’t work. Watch this spot for more information later. But poor Grace has missed out on what she wanted to do in the Sixth form by failing her Chemistry; I might add that it would appear that many in her year also failed; she also managed to fail Maths. This has scuppered her chance of going to Sixth form to do what she wants, unless we send her privately. She says now that she wants to go to college instead to study Biology and Nutrition. She was not in the mood to discuss other alternatives today so we have had to leave her to simmer down and maybe she will be more amenable to discussion later in the week. So hard being a grandparent – I hate seeing the kids upset. We also feel bad because we really want them to do well and I also think that Grace feels bad because she feels she has let us down. But feeling bad ain’t helping anyone – I will point that out to her tomorrow I think.

On the plus side we are now the proud owners of Harry’s Shamba. The paperwork was signed and witnessed and the money handed over so that’s that. Next we need to try and fence it off as we have a neighbour who refuses to tether her goats so the wretched animals are wondering into the land and munching all the vegetables. The same said neighbour does not pen in her hens either, so those also come and help themselves to the greenery. I have offered to go round and terrorise her.

Ismael is going to research how much it will cost to put up a fence for us. I think he’s really desperate for money at the moment so I would rather pay him a fair price if he is able to and wants to do the job. The plumber is coming tomorrow to finish off the pipework and stand pipe for the underground storage tank and then Wilson will be able to finish off his bits. So we are continuing along slowly getting somewhere even if we are not sure where that is.

Naughty Joshua rolled in just after 4.00pm. He should have been home by 3.00pm. He has been told countless times to come straight home from school and not stop off on the way to play or whatever he is doing. Then, when he was on his own with me for a few minutes the sneaky little so-and-so tried to persuade me to let him put on the TV for five or ten minutes. He knows what the rules are but thought he would try it on with me. Of course he picked on the wrong one with me as the TV is a sore point. Grace ticked him off and then Catherine ticked him off again. Can’t blame the kid for trying. Bless his little innocent face – NOT!! I got him and Grace looking at a lovely Science reference book and we talked about the development of life on earth. No one seems to read for pleasure here, which is a real shame. Not sure what I can do to encourage that but I will have a think. Any ideas welcomed.

We set off for the bus and we were lucky that it was still going to Sanawari albeit via all points of the compass, but we made it to the main road eventually and walked back to Equator for dinner. I have spent ages still trying to get online to check the league tables in the aftermath of the results but so far have failed miserably. I shall keep trying a bit longer.

**Wednesday 31st January**

I thought I wouldn’t have a lot to write about today but there is always something going on or something to report. We went up to the house – the road is now almost unbelievably bad and incredibly dangerous so our car did a good job getting us there. In fact we felt so sorry for him that we got out and walked the last little bit. Soon no one will be able to get anywhere if things get much worse or if the weather deteriorates and there is more rain. Grace has been pretty miserable most of today. She is really down about her results but I did my best to jolly her along. I did manage to get a smile out of her when I gave her some money as payment in advance for having to hold the fort next week and the week after when everyone is out on the Social Welfare course. I can’t envisage many 18 year old in the UK being so compliant and agreeing to run the house and look after the children or actually any that would be capable and responsible enough to do so.

Grace and I spent some time making a colourful poster for photographs of Harry’s Shamba. One is already up on Facebook. Ismael had gone with the plumber to supervise purchase of the parts needed for the water storage tank; Catherine rightly has insisted on receipts. Around 12 I heard the gate opening and suddenly a familiar face appeared at the door. It was Julieth. She had turned up to surprise Catherine and in her turn got an even bigger surprise seeing us. She was very annoyed for a short while that we hadn’t been in touch – Catherine maintains she told Julieth when we were coming – so that was another lively conversation. Julieth is adorable and I love her to bits. She is so comical and endearing and has a really big heart. Her new building out at Magi ya Chai (brown water) is nearly finished. She will be moving the whole Ebeneser organisation out there which will make life a lot easier for her. That area is very different to ours. We are in lush green vegetation whereas around Julieth’s place it is dry and arid and it is difficult to grow much at all. One reason for this is the high concentration of fluoride in the soil and the water – hence brown water – and there is a lot less rainfall generally.

Teddy was there today with baby Elkana who is now nearly ten months old. I am relieved he has made it past 6 months unlike poor baby Andrew; Catherine says she panics if Elkana has the slightest sniffle – but there again Andrew showed no sign of anything being wrong with him at all. After lunch we all went to the Shamba to take pictures and inspect the boundaries to assess what fencing is needed. We will have to do something at least on one side as goat damage is quite evident. I just don’t want to end up spending too much money on the project if we can avoid it. Trying to get everyone out of the door and down to the shamba became a major exercise. First Julieth was distracted by my tattoo and Catherine told her it was a scorpion, which it isn’t. It’s a dragonfly. Then the pair of them felt the need to inspect my back for blemishes and zits. Sadly for me one was located which then involved a rather painful few minutes whilst Julieth attempted surgery with Catherine egging her on. I was told to just relax. Then Catherine disappeared again – goodness knows why, then Anna came and went and came back but we did all make it in the end.

Thunder was rolling around overhead so Julieth decided to leave before it started to rain. Anna picked her a great bunch of green vegetable to take with her. Julieth had brought us about 4 litres of milk from her two cows. Catherine always boils milk to pasteurise it before it can be used. So off Julieth went and we settled down for a good chat. Catherine and Anna are extremely capable and run the place beautifully but sometimes I think Catherine likes to the chew the fat over small things that are bothering her. Today the subject was Joshua who appears to be flexing his muscles and not behaving very well at all. He is being quite defiant to Catherine and repeatedly refusing to do as he is told despite reminders and warnings. My contribution was that basically I don’t think there is a big issue at this point but he does need to respect the rules and not do some of his less desirable behaviours. He hadn’t arrived home when we left at 4.30 despite having been told yesterday that this lateness has to stop. We actually ran into him on the way to the daladala. He was on a road he had no business being on at all. Grace ticked him off and I told to get on home and quickly. He will get a nasty little surprise on Sunday when the TV is allowed for a while in the evening and he finds himself not watching it but going to bed. He actually did something really quite naughty yesterday which Catherine told me about today, which has made me very cross indeed with him. So when we get everyone little lollipops at the weekend and they are handed out, Joshua will find himself without one. When he asks why no lollipop for him, he will be taken to Catherine’s room by her and me and we will spend some time explaining that what he did yesterday was very wrong and must never happen again. I know he is only seven but things need to be nipped in the bud right now.

The problem is that because he came to us from such a dire situation – abandoned on the street – everyone felt really bad for him and I think he has gotten away with quite a lot as a result. On top of that he idolises David and when David is at home he plays up to him and attempts to divide and rule. All quite normal and I am not worried at this point but Catherine needed to talk it all through and come up with some management plans. We shall see what happens next. I remember we had major concerns with Elia for several years, but somehow he was easy to deal with; he spoke good English very quickly, he had a good command of language in general so would communicate what was troubling him and best of all he didn’t ever sulk. I suppose it helped that he could charm the birds from the trees if he wanted to – in fact he still can. I have to admit to having an extremely soft spot for that boy; he touches me at a deep level that I can’t readily explain.

So, as usual always something to think about, talk about and write about. The daladala ride down to the main road was awful today – we were busy congratulating ourselves on having survived it and even the daladala boy shook our hands when we eventually fought our way off the bus at our stop. Nightmarish it was. No wonder very few European venture onto this mode of transport – we are an extremely rare sight on them. I will close now as cake and a cuppa are beckoning. We are off to see David and Elia at school tomorrow – I hope I don’t end up having another argument with the head teacher.

PS All the examinees doing chemistry O-Level at Graces’ school had to share apparatus in the practical exam- so if someone was slow then Grace had to wait and she feels this slowed her down so contributing to her failure. It could well be a part of the story – who knows.

**Thursday 1st February**

At about 11 Mike and I started our long, dirty, dusty and very noisy walk right through town to meet Catherine at Kilombero – the bus station where we catch the daladala to go to see David and Elia at Edmond Rice school. We had been trying with no success to get onto the results website to see what had happened in more detail to Grace’s examination results. We did manage to get on in the evening and discovered that in fact 73% had passed the chemistry exam; this has brought into question why Grace managed to fail. She told us that many, many had failed and we had been led to believe that the fault lay entirely with the school. Agreed, many had failed but many more had passed so whether Grace just flunked the exam or perhaps hadn’t been working as hard as she could have been working now begs the question. Either way, it makes no difference to the outcome – she has messed up big time and we now have a problem with what to do next. Catherine is going to take her back to school in a couple of weeks’ time to talk to the academic tutor and get some ideas. Grace doesn’t want to go but that’s too bad. She has to learn to face the music and overcome her embarrassment at having failed.

By the time we had made it through town I was a nervous wreck. It is so noisy and bustling and I worry all the time about Mike getting mugged or distracted by hawkers and the like. So we collapsed into a coffee bar to recover ourselves. I had hoped we might run into our friend Paradise who hangs out in that area but he was nowhere to be seen. We had our tea and then went in search of toothpaste for the boys. The large supermarket that used to be there had closed down, gone bankrupt I gather, but we managed to find a small shop and got the toothpaste. Eventually Catherine arrived at our meeting point. She had come from a meeting about the course that starts next week. We bought soda and biscuits for the boys and then crammed onto the correct bus. I got cross with a young man trying to push in front of us. Such bad behaviour. It was really hot on the bus and we clanked and clattered for about ½ hour and finally managed to arrive outside the school gates. It is really hard to describe how unpleasant dala trips can be and I always count myself lucky to survive. A nightmare but a cheap nightmare so needs must.

We went in search of the two lads and a teacher sent someone to look for them. The head teacher came to shake hands and I managed to be polite. He was obviously not overjoyed to see me after last visit’s unfortunate happenings and I noticed he was keeping a pretty close eye on us most of the time we were there. David and Elia eventually arrived and were so pleased to see us. They really miss being at home. Elia consumed vast quantities of biscuits and most of the soda. I know it is not right to have favourites but I do have a very soft spot for Elia and we seem to have formed a close bond and a tight connection that I can’t readily explain. I just love him. Anyway, both of them are doing very well and feel that things have radically changed at the school since we went berserk at the head and at the diocese last time. So maybe it wasn’t all in vain. Today there were elections going on for a student council and the staff have been told that they have to start listening to students and take notice when genuine problems arise. All good stuff. Elia is working exceptionally hard; David said that whenever he tries to find Elia, Elia is always busy doing something to do with his studies. Elia says he wants to build a good life for himself and seems to get that that is largely down to his own efforts. What a star! David is working solidly and his grades seem to be better than originally anticipated – I just hope he doesn’t mess up in September when the exams are taken. A lovely young man, friend of David, joined us and he was exceptionally personably and a delight to be with. So all in all we had a good afternoon with them. I was sad to say goodbye to them both and Elia and I shed a secret tear together.

Catherine really misses them when they are at school. They help her out on the shamba and with the younger children. David has been told that he has to be firmer with little Joshua and we filled him in on what he has been up to recently. We had to wait ages for a dala dala to go back to Arusha and while waiting Catherine told me about the morning meeting. That resulted in me sending several texts and whats apps to the two useless social welfare officers to again question what the hell do they think they are doing continuing to drag their feet on the licence thing. I suggested that I might have to visit the course next week and talk to the National Commissioner for Social Welfare to ask for his help. Rumour has it that they are hoping for bribery money; if that were to be the case, I would report them to the government immediately. We shall see what happens in the next few days. Catherine also told me that somehow or other they had managed to lose all our papers that were submitted in October last year. Thank god we had copies of everything. Totally useless they are.

We got back to Arusha around 6.00pm and we walked slowly back to Equator. We had dinner and then we had showers and went to bed. I was completely knackered.

**Friday February 2nd**

I just remembered – if you are trying to grow good avocado trees, you have to cut the trunk on a regular basis and fill the wound with salt. This supposed to give the fruit a much better flavour. I learn something new every day.

Today I managed to literally get caught napping by Catherine who came much earlier than expected to see us at Equator. It was in fact 11.00 am. I was still in bed when she came up to our room. I had slept through breakfast and Mike doing his exercises. I obviously needed the sleep as I have felt much better today. She had been to put in her monthly report and one of the officers told her she would probably have all the papers ready for her next week for her to give to the Commissioner. I won’t hold my breath but maybe I have rattled her cage a little. Time will show. Mike spent some time with Catherine on the government website so she could see what the position was for herself. It would seem that the school is doing better overall in the regional and national ratings so that’s good news.

We chatted about the children more today. Various stories from the past emerge from time to time which always entertain me. Last year I think, Aron and Dominic decided to tear up mercy’s revision notes that she had been working so hard on. They decided that Mercy was doing too well. Not a good thing to do. Mercy of course was justifiably furious and made her feelings very well known. After a couple of days the boys realised the error of their ways and apologised to Mercy, who agreed to forgive them so peace was restored. She also told us that the now absent Johanes decided one day to put salt in Anna’s bath water. Poor Anna had no idea why her skin became sore and dry but didn’t say anything as she was a bit confused as to what had happened. The truth emerged some time later when Johanes boasted about what he done to the others who of course told Anna, so then it all made sense to her. How those women remain sane and seem to flourish in the house beats me. I would have been locked up in the funny farm a long time ago. They are very special those two. We had a bit more discussion about the upcoming cunning plans for Joshua’s punishments; I am almost feeling sorry for him but he has to learn to behave and not defy Catherine whenever he feels like it. She doesn’t have the time to spend hours facing him down but if needs b that’s what she will have to do. We did a little role play which always entertains Catherine and she understands more clearly what I am trying to get across. Little swine he is bless him.

We also tried to make sense of Ismael’s guesstimates for the fence at the rear of the shamba. Ismael is only barely literate so it’s hard to understand what he has written down. Hopefully we will see him tomorrow so we can clarify exactly what is needed and the associated costs. The plumber has more or less completed the pipework for the underground storage tank minus something to do with a ballcock. Catherine left at about 1.30 and when I went down to see her off I found an old friend of mine Jens, from Denmark, was sitting working and having some coffee. I went to have a chat with him and we got to talking about us wanting to do a small safari to Tarangire for a couple of days next week. He has managed to arrange at cost price a lovely trip, leaving 7.00am Monday. We will drive direct to Tarangire and spend the whole day there with a packed lunch. We will then go to a small tented lodge for the night; Jens tells me it’s beautiful there and advises arriving early to enjoy the surroundings. Then on Tuesday we return to a different sector of Tarangire and have another full dy in the park before driving back to Arusha early evening. It sounds wonderful and I am so happy we are going to do it. Tarangire is heaven on earth and is very green at the moment because of a lot of rain. I am happy and excited tonight.

We then headed briefly into town to exchange various monies – the rate has gone up a bit more which is always good news. We bought two great pineapples and a huge watermelon for £4.56 to take up to the house tomorrow. We thought that Patrick and his second family were coming for the day but he has just cancelled out on us. His partner’s father has just died so Patrick has to go to the funeral tomorrow. Maybe he will make it next Saturday. A shame but these things happen. So a lovely relaxing day today and not a sniff of a daladala to my great relief. We are now going to eat cake, take tea and watch a movie for a change.

**Saturday 3rd February**

Today was a mixed day in La-La Land. How local people maintain a relatively calm exterior and don’t all have strokes at least once a day beats me. First, trying to get up the road to get to the house. Silvester manfully wove his way in and out of various mini-mountains but eventually everything ground to a halt when the road was completely blocked by a massive digger so nothing could move in either direction. So we sat in the sweltering heat and waited until eventually said machine decided maybe it needed to smooth out a small part of the road so we and many others to get past. So we arrived at the house with our two huge pineapples and one huge watermelon. We were greeted by Ismael and the plumber who proudly showed their handiwork – basically a total and utter cock-up. They seemed to be totally unaware of what a mess they had made of the simple job of installing a tap and had also gone ahead and got an electrician to wire up and install the pump. This was put right under where the overflow was meant to go so would be completely soaked as soon as any water started to flow out from the tank. I had a fit and Silvester and Mike stepped in and tried to sort it out. Long story short – we have to pay almost twice as much just to rectify the situation. I am not in any way slightly amused. On top of that Ismael had seriously underestimated the money needed for the wretched fence and had some weird and wonderful plan for concreting in the bottom of a simple wire fence – totally unnecessary and a complete waste of money. So then he got into trouble. Catherine got into trouble for constantly telling me that it’s only a little money – it bloody well isn’t. This bloody fence is costing about £200 which is a lot of money in this neck of the woods. So we had a little argument but all is OK now. We would have to lose a lot of produce to goats and chickens to make the fence pay for itself but it’s done now. Everyone has been warned NOT to ask for any more little money for anything. I think they have the idea – how long for of course is another matter. Goldfish brains the lot of them.

So that drama subsided and they went on their merry way to purchase the materials. Then it was time to spend some time with the kids who had been given the day off from school so we could spend time with them. Mercy did my chin plucking for me – it’s her main task when I am there. Goodluck, Mercy, Domi and Aron spent time teaching me various puzzles they had devised. We played boxes, four in a row and generally larked about. Joram and I ministered to Charlie who Mike said was unwell. There was nothing wrong with him thank goodness and he was allowed to be lose for some of the time. He arrived on the porch and dived headlong over Mike to get on my lap where he sat smugly lapping up the attention. He is still very puppyish but a real nice little chap. Mike gave some mathematical puzzles to us to try and solve. Clever-clogs Goodluck found the solutions very quickly and understood the reasoning involved. A bright youngster he is for sure.

At one point a DVD was put on the laptop and this was the point at which Joshua, Catherine and myself withdrew to Joshua’s room for the telling off session. This seemed to take rather a long time but I think we have got to the bottom of what has been happening and why. He has been told not to follow in the footsteps of so-called friends who are leading him up the wrong path. He has also been told that he will have to TV this weekend. That started the wailing so seems to be a good choice of sanction. He begged to be allowed but we stood our ground. He knows that as long as he behaves next week then TV will be back on the agenda next weekend; it’s in his hands. He has also been told that he is not the boss in the house and that he has to respect what his elders say to him. When it came to the distribution of lollipops after lunch he missed out – this was for the other quite serious misdemeanour last week. He looked crest-fallen but seemed to accept his lose gracefully so no more had to be said. The older kids have been asked to remind him when he leaves school to go straight home without disappearing off to goodness knows where for hours on end. So I hope this will be the end of the matter but if not then Catherine must stand firm with him until he learns to do what he is told for his own safety and for everyone’s peace of mind. Never a dull moment.

At some point a huge truck clattered up the road and managed to reverse through our gates to deposit a load of sand plus concrete posts and wire. Ismael had to dash off – something about being on the committee for his son’s upcoming wedding in March. We have been invited but won’t be able to attend which is a shame. Usalama House will go en masse. We are expected to contribute to the wedding expenses as is customary in this part of the world.

Aron spent most of the afternoon doing Anna’s hair which quite amusing. It takes an age to unplait and re-plait and Aron seems quite good at it. We left them all too it at about 5 and wearily trudged down to the dala dala – it was the same conductor as yesterday and he seems to find it entertaining to watch us suffering at the back of the bus and even more entertaining watching us trying to get off at our stop. I am becoming increasingly disenchanted with this mode of travel but needs must so we carry on. I wasn’t at all hungry this evening so just had a small omelette for supper. I have cheered up now since I discovered chocolate fudge cake in the fridge; I had forgotten it was there so will now stop the writing and go and eat it.

**Sunday February 4th**

We have had a good day to day. As the weather hots up here I gather that it is getting colder in the UK so not complaining at all about seeing the sun and blue skies. We toddled up with Silvester who confused everyone by putting in his wooden spoon regarding the pipework for the wretched storage tank. Later on the plumber and Ismael and Wilson arrived and we went through the whole boring thing again. It seems that the plumber/Ismael have done everything correctly according to Wilson’s plans and so we have had to backtrack and eat humble pie with many apologies. A case of too many cooks etc. So sometime this week the whole sorry story will come to a hopefully satisfactory conclusion. I do hope so because I am sick of hearing about it. The three of them will help Ismael with the fence but Ismael will be the boss on this occasion. They seem to be good mates and the job will be done correctly.

Anna has a cold which is a shame as the three girls are off on their course for this week and next week. She was worrying about her hair as she had a headache and refused paracetamol. She went off to get it done and it looked fine to me. Poor Anna – she has Catherine and me interfering in her personal life; this time it was instructions about the best time to “do it” to optimise her chances of conception. She laughed when I drew her a timetable. She takes our interferences in good spirit and it doesn’t seem to upset her so we will continue I am sure. Poor Joshua is taking is no TV punishment on the chin. He took himself outside when the others were watching a DVD before lunch without being told and did the same this evening. We found him sitting forlornly on the step looking totally miserable so I think he has learned his lesson at least for now. After lunch all seven wanted to go and have their heads shaved as they can’t be bothered to comb their hair and Mike went along for the ride. They were away for ages. It was lovely to spend a little quality time with Catherine on our own. We talk about so many different things. The topic of the day was shaving armpits and smelly armpits. Delightful. Elia can get a bit ripe sometimes as can Aron, his younger brother. Something familial I suppose. Catherine says if she smells it’s only her left armpit and she also says that Grace is the same. My contribution was to say that I can shave my left armpit better than my right one being right-handed. They were inspected and pronounced to be OK. Strange conversations we have. But we laugh a lot which is good for us both. Charlie came and sat on my knee a couple of times and attempted to chew the hair from my head. He is a sweet boy he really is.

We won’t see very much of Catherine, Anna and Teddy this week because they are away all day on their course. It is a possibility that I won’t see them again until Catherine comes to the hotel next Sunday to say goodbye before we depart very, very early on Monday week morning. But if they can they might pop in to say hi after the course if we are around at the hotel or we might meet them at Sanawari for a quick soda and catch up one of the days. We will definitely go to the house next Friday as the kids have a half day and also on Saturday for the last time. We may go up on Thursday as well to take money up for Wilson to complete all the work. So this next week will fly by. We leave tomorrow morning at 7.00am for our two-day trip to Tarangire National Park. I am so looking forward to it – it is stunningly beautiful and hopefully we will get to see a lot of wildlife, in particular large herds of elephant. Sadly there no large tuskers left as poaching continues to take its toll.

Mercy has made a spinning top and a whip to work it with. I guess it is similar to the toys Victorian children used to play with. She is a clever young lass. They all took turns to see how long they could keep it spinning for – Mercy was pretty adept at it as she is at most things she does. She is quite the little solar engineer and rigs up all manner of small lights from bits and pieces she finds around the streets.

When we left I asked everyone to cooperate with Grace who is in charge for the next two weeks. It is a big job for her and she will report to me if anyone causes any problems – that person will do without a soda next weekend. They will also remind Joshua to go home directly from school without disappearing so he can resume TV next weekend. Goodluck is the man of the house for the week and must support Grace by ensuring everyone does their homework properly. So it’s the G & G show next week. I hope it all works out OK. Jordan, Aron and little Joshua escorted us part way down to the dala. I got whacked on the arm by some mad old Maasai woman who demanded money from me which of course I refused to hand over. I was not pleased and threatened her with being reported to the village officials. We were lucky to get on a dala dala in good condition and it wasn’t very crowded so we had quite a comfortable trip down to the main road. I am now stopping this diary as I need to shower and pack ready for the trip. I’ll write again when we are back on Tuesday.

**Monday 5th, Tuesday 6th, Wednesday 7th February**

We were up bright and early and ready for the off by 7.00am Monday. The birds were twittering away and it was lovely and cool – I really should spend less time in bed. After various stops for fuel and packed lunches we eventually arrived at the entrance to Tarangire conservation area. Our guide was Emmanuel. He was a personable young man and was obviously pretty knowledgeable about things in general. Also with us was a lad called Benson, who had been allowed to come along with us to learn a bit about what it is to be a professional safari guide. He has a long way to go having only recently completed a one year certificate. He was a cute guy and obviously appreciated being allowed to come by Jens who had arranged the trip for us at short notice.

Despite searching high and low for two full days I STILL haven’t seen a leopard. They are so elusive and primarily nocturnal so that was disappointing. Apart from that we had a really lovely two days and saw a lot of different animals and birds; but above everything else we saw elephants and hundreds of them. The area is well known for its elephants and didn’t disappoint. We spent a lot of time just sitting and observing their antics and behaviours. I love to hear the low rumbling sound as they go about their business and communicate with each other. I noticed that we didn’t see any of the really large tuskers that used to be there – they have been poached for their ivory which is very sad and totally disgusting. The current president has now issued an order that rangers can shoot to kill if poachers are caught in the area. Emmanuel said that they are risking their lives as they hunt on foot at night and could easily get taken by lion or leopard – serves them right in my view. I know exactly what I would do with them if I caught them.

Most of the groups we encountered were calm and seemed quite relaxed. But there were two groups that seemed edgy and ill at ease. One young matriarch actually did a mock charge and apparently another vehicle was charged as well. We think these were maybe traumatised by poachers taking one of their family members in the recent past. They were all very protective of the babies who stayed close to their mums and other adults. The park was lush and green with plenty of mud and water around for the elephants to enjoy a good wallow. They do this to protect their skin for the sun and also to eradicate any skin pests. They drink about 250 litres per day and take 10 litres at one slurp. Emmanuel was entertained when we told him the Just So story about how the elephant got its nose; he thought it was very funny. The whole area probably has in excess of 6,000 elephants and we must have seen a large proportion of them. Such wonderful animals.

We were lucky on the first day to discover a small group of three young lions – two females and one male. There was another one close by but we didn’t get a good look at it. The problem is that when word gets out that someone has seen something significant all vehicles race to the spot and this must cause the animals a certain amount of disturbance. The three youngsters hung around for a bit but then headed off into the bush and away from cameras and vehicles and people. We did manage to find a female cheetah and two cubs; they were concealed in a bush and I admire the guides for spotting these animals when they are so well hidden. Our vehicle decided to play up and not start at that point, so we all had to get out (hoping no lions and elis were around) to push and shove the heavy vehicle out of the dirt and onto a better piece of road for a push start I wasn’t sweaty before that but I was well lathered up by the time we had finished. One youngster came out of the bush to watch what was going on. You could almost hear him or her thinking what on earth are those weird animals doing prancing about under the full heat of the sun.

We encountered many other animals and countless species of birds. I am not going to name them all as that would be boring and anyway I can’t remember them all. We did stop to move a large leopard tortoise out of the road to save it from destruction. We also saw one giraffe who wasn’t looking too well and seemed to have a bad case of hiccups or indigestion. As a ruminant maybe it was just taking time for things to move through the gut but it wasn’t a happy giraffe. Amongst the many birds we saw, the Goliath heron sticks in my mind and also some sort of cuckoo that was right by the vehicle prancing about and performing for us. I managed to record the sounds – it would make a nice alarm call on my phone. Down in the swamp area of the park, and it is huge, there were many water birds to see and try and identify. There were plenty of impala around but remarkably few of the other small antelopes, which I found surprising given the cats need to hunt these smaller ones for their food.

We overnighted at a small tented lodge very close to the edge of the park. It was a pleasant little place and we had an excellent dinner and a very good packed lunch for the next day. At some point during the two days I managed to get myself quite badly bitten by Tsetse flies which are prevalent in that area and also probably mosquitoes. I was wearing trousers and insect repellent but still got some nasty bites. These are now driving me nuts and ruined my night last night and threaten to do the same tonight. Mike has just gone in search of something to help as we cleverly left most of our medications and potions at home. Certainly the downside to the trip. If I ever do another one I shall make sure I am totally covered in repellent and wear socks and shoes as my ankles are in a right state now. Not at all pleasant I must say.

So we spent a second very long day searching for wildlife and managed to spot a black-backed jackal early in the morning. We briefly saw a small group of ostriches as we were about to leave for home and saw two large troops of mongoose whizzing around doing whatever they do. I had a stiff neck from looking up into the trees, baobob and acacia mainly, to see if I could see leopard. By the end of the trip I was seeing leopards in every tree. Warthogs raced around comically with their little tails sticking vertically up and 5 hippo wallowed in the river eyeing us dubiously. When the river dries up which it will do fairly soon they have to walk miles to find water to survive the dry season. That also applies to many of the other animals including humans. I love Tarangire – it is so beautiful and so Africa. I feel we have seen areas not seen before and I never will tire of safari. Today (Wednesday) Jens came to get feedback and we spoke about the possibility of spending a few days in the Serengeti maybe next time we come. He is going to try and work out a way of making it affordable for us so we will think seriously about it and start saving our pennies. It is very expensive these days but Jens has some ideas for us and will do it at cost as a favour which is sweet of him. We have spent today relaxing and trying to catch up bits of work. We went to the bank for Catherine and it was remarkably quick this time so I didn’t have to get annoyed for a change. Catherine, Anna and teddy may call in late afternoon on the way back from their course but I suspect they will be in a hurry to get home. We should have been doing our business with Mama Grace today but she has postponed until tomorrow so we may have to split up – Mike going up to the house and me staying in town with Mama Grace. Time is racing by now – we return home very early hours of Monday morning – not a trip I am looking forward to and even less looking forward to the cold that you have all had recently. I suppose my bites might itch less but nothing else about the cold weather appeals to me right now. In a bit we are going to eat early at AfriCafe, get cake and watch a movie.

**Thursday 8th February**

I apologise now for todays’ entry which is likely to be peppered with various expletives and a whole heap of rage, anger and downright fed upness. I am so sick of Tanzanian authorities. I am sick of their incompetence and crass stupidity. Above all I am now totally convinced that no one in authority gives a sh1t about kids and their welfare. They are just there to make life as difficult as possible for poor unfortunates such ourselves who are just trying to do a little bit to help a few youngsters to a brighter future. Catherine, Anna and Teddy called in on their way back from their course yesterday afternoon. Catherine told us we had to repeat all our paperwork because the local Social Welfare incompetent called Grace had managed to lose everything including originals. Because of that we now have to get all copies we had taken certified by a lawyer – at our expense of course. We did speak to an old guy who comes here to drink every night who is a lawyer; we had hoped he might do it for us out of the kindness of his heart. Stupid us. He wanted $100 reduced to $50 just to stamp a few pieces of paper. Charming. I shan’t be smiling at him any more that’s for certain. On top of that one of the forms has to be an original which is amongst the lost file so I then had to go all the way to the council offices this morning to collect another form. Simple you might think. No way. First the taxi came too early and we weren’t ready. Said taxi disappeared and came back half an hour later than arranged. No matter we said so off we went.

Got to the offices concerned and no sign of the stupid and now absent Grace. I tried to explain to a secretary that Grace knew we were coming for the papers. So very helpfully she went to a pile of A4 paper and tried to give me a sheet. Not funny in case you were thinking about laughing. So I said again what I needed –Form B(2) and waved a copy at her. So she knocked on a door and ushered me in. Two females, I know not who, were there with two sorry looking specimens obviously on the receiving end of officialdom in all its mighty madness. I tried to explain again what was needed so was told to go out and wait – for how long says I- just wait I am told. So we wait again. (Bear in mind we were short of time and had asked our taxi to wait for us) I then started to shout at the first woman who called another woman who was about as clued up as an amoeba on a degree course. She told me to go back into the room, so back I went. The original woman in the room had started to make some vain attempts at finding said form B(2) and was also trying to contact the missing Grace person. I was by now steaming and threatening everyone with anything I could think of and was also suggesting they might like to pay for my taxi charge at which they all shook their heads vehemently. Panic was beginning to set in and I was close to having a total brain close down. I spotted a cupboard full of ridge files. I scanned them and spotted one that said Fostering/Children’s Homes. The panic stricken woman said no way could that possibly be the right folder and left the room to look elsewhere. I took the law into my own hands and grabbed the folder from the cupboard. Strange but true – THERE in the folder marked **Children’s Homes** was the Form B(2). The woman reappeared and I was in the process of removing two copies of said form. I took them and left.

For pity’s sake what is wrong with these people. Meanwhile poor Catherine, Anna and Teddy have to leave home a silly o’clock, they have to walk 20 minutes, bus down the non-existent road for 20 minutes, walk another 20 minutes and bus another 20 minutes all in time for 8.30am. (And all at our expense!!) This course that they are on is all about child welfare. What about the welfare of Teddy’s baby Elkana who ended up in hospital yesterday with some sort of chest problem. Those who don’t remember what happened to baby Andrew, who died at 6 months, now bear that in mind. Then last night Teddy had to go again with Elkana to hospital as he was no better. But she was still expected to be on the course. She attended the morning but left at lunch time to go home to him. She was told she could bring him with her to the course but she should attend. So much for child welfare – carting a poorly baby around the place and expecting Mama to cope with poorly baby as well as sitting for hours on end listening to some dullard droning on is hardly modelling good child care. Stupid morons, the lot of them. What a waste of their time, their energy and all the rest of it. Catherine is exhausted. We have hardly seen anything of her this week and she needs to stay home on Sunday and rest and be with the kids – she was planning to come to see us at the hotel before we leave early hours of Monday. We will do our best to dissuade her. It may mean we have to go up on Sunday for a little while just to make her stay put. Not the best of times to be here I must say. Tomorrow we will go up and see how Gracie has been coping with everything this week and find out if Joshua has been coming home on time as he was instructed to do. Catherine is too tired to follow it up so we will.

Apart from all of the above all is OK. My bites are still driving me mad but slowly calming down a bit. All went well when I went to see Mama Grace and finish my shopping with her. I have another load of lovelies to bring home to sell for the charity including some very pretty painted wooden bowls and some beautiful large beaded baskets. I need to start booking up some fairs for the summer and get selling. Never a dull moment for sure.

**Saturday 10th February**

Today was our last day at the house. We went up a bit earlier than usual as the kids had the day off and Grace appreciates a bit of support. I cannot think of any 18 year old girls who would be capable of, let alone willing to, run the house as effectively and efficiently as Grace has done over this last week. She has kept it clean, she has cooked all the meals, she has kept everyone in order and even recording the homecoming times of Joshua. I am happy to report that he has come home at the correct time so is now allowed to watch the TV and videos. He knows if he starts his antics again TV will again be banned so hopefully that is the end of the story and the battle has been won. I’m sure there will be many more in the future.

Today we uploaded all our pictures from this trip and the kids enjoyed looking through them all. They have so little knowledge of the world outside of their own narrow world and it is remarkable how little they and many adults know about the environment and the animals that are right on their doorstep. Mike and I think we should try and get some money together to take the whole household to Tarangire in the future so they can experience the wildlife and environment at its best. Ismael has never seen an elephant, except on TV so we will take him too. Our household is slowly extending as Anna’s little Juliana is rapidly becoming integrated into the Usalama fold. She is about five and has recently been taken under Anna’s wing. She is one of seven and a twin. Her mother is one of Anna’s sisters; her father went awol some time ago and the mother is destitute and mentally ill so all the children have been split up amongst various people and Juliana has been separated from her twin. No one know where he is now. So sad.

Grace made Makande for lunch which is nice but rather stodgy. We had bought more delicious pineapple up for afters. They are so good at the moment. I have Joshua and Juliana the duplo to play with in Joshua’s room so that kept them entertained for ages; Jordan joined in and built a smashing model of a house and garden. Goodluck took charge of taking orders for soda and then purchasing and distributing them. I still managed to get the wrong one but Joshua kindly swapped with me. They all got absorbed in some dreadful video on the laptop and became square-eyed but quiet. So we missed out on our entertainment as a result. Ismael dropped by in the early afternoon to water his concrete at the base of the fence. He stopped for a while and had chai with us. His son is getting married in three weeks’ time and in local tradition cards are sent out to everyone and anyone basically asking for cash to help pay for the wedding. He said 600 – 700 people will attend the ceremony and about 300 will attend the send off on the Thursday. These people are not well- off but still they bankrupt themselves for the sake of public face. So silly but perhaps not that different in our culture.

By 3 we still hadn’t heard anything from Catherine so assumed that they hadn’t been able to escape early from the course. We decided to take our leave early to get back to make a start on our packing. I am quite concerned about the continuing eruption of very itchy and large lumps which burst and form scabby swellings all over me. I am assuming it is some sort of reaction to tsetse fly bites I got at Tarangire but can’t quite fathom out why they are still appearing almost hourly. They are horrible things. I will see the GP as soon as I get back to make sure I haven’t contracted anything serious – in particular sleeping sickness which is dangerous if not treated in the early stages. As soon as we got back to the hotel I put my poor feet and legs in cold water which calmed things down at least temporarily.

We had a very quick house chat and said goodbye to everyone. Grace, Joram and Domi will come to Equator for lunch tomorrow – pizza is a favourite. Grace will be grateful to escape the house for a while as she has another week of incarceration still to come. She said no way does she want to have a job like that in the future so she will need to get her finger out and fathom out what to do next. Mercy did her usual disappearing act at goodbye time. She hates it when we go but I persuaded her so come and give us both a hug and a kiss. She has known us such a long time now – she cannot recall life before we came onto the scene bless her. And so we left and struggled down to the dala dala. The dust is getting really bad now as there has been no rain since we arrived. We then had a horrendous ride down to the main road. What local people have to put up with beggars belief it really does. The road down is virtually impassable and it has already been two months since the work started. If they don’t complete before the next rains come the road will become too dangerous to drive on or even walk along. We ran into Silvester at Sanawari and he very kindly gave us a free lift back to Equator. We sorted out our airport pick-up time – 1.30 am on Monday morning ugh!! We still hadn’t heard anything from Catherine so set about our packing. Eventually we heard from her. She said she wouldn’t be calling in as she was really tired and had gone directly to the market to get stuff for next week. Those poor women must be completely exhausted. We decamped to Africafe after having dragged two heavily packed bags down the stairs to the store. Obviously cake was on the menu.

I intend to pass on breakfast and get as much sleep as possible if my bites or whatever they are will allow me some respite. Kids come at 1.00pm and also Jens and Patrick will probably pop in to say goodbye. I am now waiting until10.00pm to try and check in online if the stupid intermittent internet behaves itself properly. If not I will have another go in the morning.