

Diary – February/March 2015

February 26th – 27th – 28th

I have to say that for some reason I have not been looking forward to this trip but I feel a lot better now that I am here. Leaving my beloved Charlie (dog) who is so old and wobbly is hard but I could not cancel again having cancelled in January so poor Mike had to come on his own. But I am here now and only for two weeks so I will have plenty to do and the time is already moving quickly.

The flight was long and tedious as always – I have done it so many times that is no longer exciting but purely a means to an end. We were about an hour delayed in Amsterdam due to late arriving passengers bound for Kigali but eventually we were on our way. I eventually managed to find four seats to myself so dozed fitfully in between eating and trying to watch the movie *Gone Girl*. The queue for entry at Kilimanjaro airport was slow and long and I was vaguely amused by the pathetic attempts that were made for health screening. Basically we were provided with a short questionnaire on the plane and all that happened was that a silly man in gloves took the papers from us as we entered the airport. No one was checked and the papers were piled in a bundle and taken somewhere and presumably destroyed. Tourism is still being badly affected by the Ebola scare even though it is dying back now and there have been no cases of Ebola anywhere in East Africa.

Good old Silvester was waiting for me outside and we piled into the car and made our way very slowly to Ilboru. I think he must have been very tired as his driving was snail-like to say the least. But he is always good company and chatted away about his family – his mother's relatively new house is being eaten away by termites – and politics and life in general. I was greeted warmly on arrival and went straight to my room. I unpacked, made myself at home, made myself a wonderful cup of tea and went to bed.

I was awoken quite early by Racheal knocking on my door. She had come to tell me that they had forgotten to mention that I had to move out of my room for one night as they were overbooked. So all my unpacking was a complete waste of time. They had booked me in at the local guest house but I was not happy to be there again on my own so in the end they made up a bed for me in the conference centre and I had a pretty miserable night there for my second night. They had sprayed liberally with insect repellent as there were no mosquito nets. Getting to the loo was a pain involving locking and unlocking three sets of doors. And of course when my brain tells me that I do not need to go then I end up needing to pee **AT LEAST THREE TIMES THROUGH THE NIGHT**. So not a lot of sleep. In addition the guards decided at some ungodly hour to have a major row about something or other right outside the window resulting in even less sleep. And then a totally blocked nose due to the spraying led me to even less sleep. Never mind – I am now in my room – 32 not 34 for the duration thank goodness.

So, Friday, my first day was spent packing and moving and waiting for Catherine to come. She came around midday and we spent several hours catching up, chewing the fat and generally reacquainting ourselves. This is always a special time for us both – time alone without interruptions and picking up where we left off last time. Several of the children have a virus at the moment and Catherine wasn't feeling too great. She gets quite panicky if anyone runs a fever, assuming that they all have malaria. So everyone is subjected to various invasive blood tests which on this occasion showed nothing. Better safe than sorry I guess. We are now a little concerned about our boy with HIV. His last blood test showed a significant drop in his CD4 count and we are questioning at what point medication should start. I hope to go to see the HIV clinic called DREAM whilst I am here to discuss the matter with the doctors. We had a long discussion about when to tell him that he has the disease. He has never asked

any questions; he has never questioned why he has to go to DREAM regularly and have regular blood tests. But I suspect that somewhere inside he must have some idea of what the problem is and he is getting to an age when it is important that he knows what he has so that he can learn how to protect himself and others. We don't want to frighten him so we are searching our hearts for the best way to tell him. Stormy waters lie ahead I guess – particularly as he is not the easiest of our children and already stands apart from the group a lot of the time. This discussion led on to another discussion about sex education. I am all for talking to everyone about safe sex etc but Catherine is far more reticent about the matter. We agreed for now that we will talk to David and Grace and possibly Elia. Catherine is worried that if we discuss this matter with Elia it will encourage him to go out and try stuff – she may have a point – but I would prefer that if they do end up doing what comes naturally that they feel able to discuss it with us and feel able to protect themselves and partners from HIV, pregnancy, hepatitis and so on. More stormy waters – the consequences of having a large number of children who have the inconsideration to grow up instead of staying as sweet little kids are huge and challenging. Trying to deal with all this stuff in the midst of vast cultural differences is really quite hard and is involving Catherine and myself in challenging our own thoughts, prejudices and belief systems. It is wonderful to be able to do this together as friends and carers without any fallings out or bad feeling.

Catherine went home at about six and I went straight to eat. The menu has entirely changed along with many other things since Ad's departure last May. Now there is only a set three course meal with two choices at a cost of \$15. Annalies has very kindly agreed that I can just take a main course and pay TzSh10,000 (about £3.80) so that's a relief. I could see myself not eating dinner at all to save money and stuffing my face with biscuits which would do me no good at all. I do miss Ad dreadfully. He was my rock and my safety valve when I was here on my own. Annalies is lovely but not in the same class as Ad. I hope to see his wife Tukae while I am here – too long a story to tell in this diary. In the dining room were a young couple having a full on marital which was my entertainment for the evening. As I write this two days later I spotted them holding hands at breakfast so whatever was going on has resolved itself for now I am pleased to say. I retired to my miserable bed early and had the night as described earlier.

I was back in my proper room early on Saturday morning and unpacked again. I then had breakfast and headed out with full bag and Silvester to Usalama House. Some of the children were at school even though it was Saturday. The school seems to be piling the pressure on as they have ambitions to rise further up the league tables in the region. I worry that the children will not have enough time to relax and rest but they do seem to cope with the long hours pretty well. The four poorly kids seemed a little better but Catherine was definitely suffering. (The wretched "n" on my laptop is not behaving very well so apologies if there a lot of typos.) Everyone was the same as ever. Jordan is still clingy and attention seeking. Joshua is a happy little chappie and loving going to school. Mercy is the same sweet loving little girl and Joram is delightful now. Johanes is still the outsider in the group. Grace and David were back from school for the weekend as it is Grace's birthday on the 29th. She is still not amused at only having a birthday once every four years but accepted my teasing about only being 3 ¾.

At this point those of you of a sensitive disposition might like to skip the next paragraph. Those of you with a sense of humour might like to take a guess at what is meant by a Koti mvua (raincoat). Answers on a postcard – a prize for the most amusing suggestions. Grace was summonsed for her sex education lecture – she was totally unabashed and very open and sensible. Catherine was great and we covered a lot of ground including the matter of koti mvua. I learned loads from our discussions. The church totally forbids sex before marriage as do many of the tribes. Everyone seems to be in total denial about kids and sex despite evidence to the contrary – so many young girls being pregnant. I suggested to

Catherine that maybe they were all virgin births which she was at once shocked and entertained. Anyway, the approach we took was that although we would prefer that sex didn't happen until engaged or married we also understood that sometimes nature took over from the brain and that in that case safety was paramount. Koti mvua again. Poor David was summonsed next and was much more embarrassed by our discussions but coped well nevertheless. Both he and Grace expressed concerns about Elia so we have now decided to ask Ismael ad fundi Wilson to have a chat with him at some point soon. Ismael told us that as far as Maasai are concerned sex is totally banned until marriage. I questioned the amount of unwanted pregnancies in young girls and Wilson said that this was due to older married men playing away – not good news. Again the subject of Koti Mvua arose (!) and Ismael found this particularly offensive. We do have a varied and amusing time sometimes. I don't know how they all put up with this older white woman coming in to their lives with such weird and revolutionary ideas. I think I may have to apologise to Ismael on Monday – but he is a lovely man so I am sure I will be forgiven.

After lunch we went up to see the new house. We are so nearly finished now – I can hardly believe that the dream is realised. It has been hard work, stressful and expensive but we have achieved a lot with the help of a few trusted people here and the many wonderful people in the UK who have kept the faith and supported us financially and emotionally so thank you to you all. To those who have not stayed the course for one reason or another – I am sad that you are not with us to celebrate the fruition of our labours. It has been a rocky road on occasions and not for the faint-hearted. I have been so close to giving up sometimes but the needs of our wonderful Usalama family have remained paramount and my husband Mike has stuck with it through thick and thin so a special thank you to him. I know I can be annoying sometimes but I am able to forgive myself when I see what has been achieved.

The wall and gates are up – or at least half the wall. We have agreed to do the other two sides of the property but at a reduced height to save money for now. It can be extended later when we can afford it. The kitchen is nearly finished. The solar hot water is providing blistering hot water although the water pressure is not great. I christened the loo in the guest room – a necessary event and much celebrated by Catherine standing outside. The chicken house will also be constructed along with the wall and this will hopefully provide income for the house in future and help towards self-sufficiency. There is plenty of space to grow vegetables and there should be a little play area for the children. All that is now needed is some more cash to fit out the bedrooms. A thoroughly good clean and a few finishing details and we will be moving in in the next few months.

Whilst at the house we heard a terrible noise coming from our neighbours. It was like a screaming banshee. We peered through the hedge and spotted a young woman rolling on the ground wailing, sobbing and screeching loudly. She then stood up and took off at a rate of knots hotly pursued by various family members who caught her and carried her back. She continued in this manner for ages. I was informed by Catherine and Ismael that she was possessed by devils and needed to go to the church to be exorcised. I tried to explain that this was most unlikely and that she more likely to be mentally ill in some way. They would have none of it. For about an hour some woman prayed over the young woman and gradually she quietened down. By the time we were ready to go back home she was totally normal again and chatting to Catherine over the fence. Very strange and very unnerving.

I forgot to mention the new orphan in our house. Butu – formally known as Beauty – is a very pretty male cat in the most gorgeous shade of grey with white paws. He arrived a few weeks ago and was apparently far too young to have left his mother. But Catherine nurtured him and he is now a very healthy little boy. Poor Butu was subjected to a bath which was horrific to watch and Butu was

seriously unamused by the whole procedure. I have made them promise not to bath him again and will persuade my vet to donate flea/worm drops to him. Life is never dull in this neck of the woods. I just wish I felt a little better physically at the moment. I seem to have a lot of muscle cramps and weakness and that together with the intense heat is sapping my strength and my confidence in my physicality.

March 1st

I slept much better last night in my large double bed. I have written the diary this morning whilst I wait for another guest here at Ilboru who wants to visit the family when she returns from church at midday. We will take a car. Tomorrow I have to get to town early to exchange money for the building and then Mama Grace is coming to Usalama House. I will talk more about her tomorrow. We will also purchase the school text books that Elia needs for Standard 6. Sylvester took Sharon and myself around 12 and everyone was there to greet us. Catherine was at home not at church because she continues to feel under the weather. Sharon was very taken by the children and Joshua in particular. He has such a lovely face and a winning smile and knows exactly how to twist everyone round his little finger bless him.

We had a continuation of the whole witch/possession stories from yesterday. With every telling the stories get wilder and less convincing. Interestingly the latest story is being pinned on to the Muslim population – demonization happens everywhere. The “Witch Way” is a weird story. Imagine that I have died except that I haven’t really died. Someone is in my coffin and it looks like me so all the mourners think it is me. Meanwhile I am sitting on the roof with my tongue cut out so that I cannot tell everyone what has happened. As to why this thing could happen – fortunately it happens only on very rare occasions(!) – no one was able to give me an explanation. And this is down to the “Witch Way” according to Silvester and Catherine. We also had a continuation of the sex education saga. Ismael arrived, I apologised for the aforementioned koti mvua blasphemy and then David and Elia were summonsed to sit with Ismael at the back of the house. This discussion went on for a very long time and everyone looked very serious. I am not privy to actually what took place and what was said but Elia emerged from the discussions as bouncy and cheeky as ever. I think I have had enough of sex education Tanzanian-style and witchcraft for the moment so will try and steer clear for the next few days.

Sunday at Usalama House is always a relaxed and happy day. The children play happily inside until the temperature cools down. Then they all go on the lawn and the usual football debacle happens. The biggest protests about rules and breaking of rules come from the mouth of Goodluck. I threaten to send him off for arguing with the referee and he gives me evil stares. Not so far removed from the real thing. I did not have a whistle for this particular game so Aron acted as my whistle as we both attempted to control the game. Joram Schmeical continues to be incredibly brave in goal and dives and jumps like a real pro. It’s all good fun and provides entertainment for visitors.

When we were ready to leave Sharon gave Catherine \$50 (Canadian) to spend on treats for the children. We consulted Elia on what would be the treats of choice – sweets or extra fish – and he went straight for the fish as did all the others. I couldn’t see that happening in the UK. Elia gave us a mini lecture on proteins and body building in his excellent English. Grace and David prevaricated and delayed – they clearly prefer being at home to staying at their Auntie’s house which is near to their school. Eventually they got themselves together and we all walked to the dala dala. I think Sharon was a bit unnerved by her dala dala ride – I told her she was lucky that the door didn’t fall off this time. I think Sharon recognised that she had a “real” Tanzanian experience in a way that tourists

would not usually have and enjoyed her day with us. We ate dinner together and I took to bed early in preparation for the vigour's of Monday.

March 2nd

There cannot be any words in the Swahili language to describe "brief or "simple" or "quick. A quick trip to town to change money and hand it over to Ismael and Wilson for building purchases turned into a full on marathon. I was up very early and had to wait for Racheal to get to work so that I could get into the safe to get the money I needed. I met Catherine at 9.00am and we walked into town and found an excellent rate of exchange which is very helpful when dealing in relatively large sums of money. We went via the grocery store to collect chilli sauce and honey – part of the treat money given by Sharon yesterday – and met up with the two men in the usual place. A quick drink and money handover and they were off. As the heat and humidity increases so does the threat of rain; if it rains the dusty roads will turn to rivers of mud and the heavy lorries won't be able deliver the blocks, cement etc. Hence the urgency (unusual as already stated) to get on with the job.

Catherine and I headed slowly through town to the bookshop. The heat is intense and I am really struggling with it. We managed to find all but one of the books we needed for Standard Six and the nice Indian owners gave us a little discount – a rare thing in this neck of the woods. Catherine then decided that now was the time to buy the sweaters and ties needed for the school uniforms so we had to head into the market to find these items. I sat for hours while Catherine ummed and ahed over quality, colour and size. The shop owner took equally long to locate the correct sweaters in his heap of stock but eventually managed to find all but one. I was nearly asleep perched on a little stool in the corner. Then it took another age to work out the price total – a simple enough task for me even in my befuddled state but not for anyone else. Finally we got there and with another little discount – surprise, surprise – we toddled off. Then Catherine decided that we really must buy the much loved tilapia – again from the treat money – so I sat on another stool whilst the smelly fish were scraped, beheaded and portioned. I sat a bit longer while Catherine went to find the one missing sweater. Then we headed out for the dala dala for home – in the full heat of 1.00pm. We got to the usual place and found that the local government had stopped the dala dalas from parking there so had to walk even further to get the right one.

We reached our destination, loaded up Catherine's head with the books and various vegetables and plodded our way up to the house. We had passed Anna on a piki piki going to collect the three smaller kids from school. It is a long way to walk in the heat so I have said they should take the dala dala at least one way in future. We collapsed in a soggy heap when we got home, did the various financial recordings and then had lunch when Anna returned with the three little ones. The chickens spent the entire time running around the house squawking madly and laying eggs in all sorts of strange places. We had an intruder cockerel from our neighbour so he was threatened with the pot if he didn't vanish immediately. Butu the cat has no table manners and I ended up sharing my dinner with him. He eats anything and everything; I couldn't see my Lena even attempting to eat omelette and ugali. He then had a little purring session on my lap which soothed my troubled breast a little.

Finally – two hours late – Mama Grace arrived. She was still clearly upset and shocked by the massive fire that totally destroyed her livelihood together with more than 100 others, when the Maasai Market was burnt to the ground at the end of last year. It is still a mystery as to how it started. The worst thing of all was that the fire fighters (the fire station is literally just down the road) arrived with no water whatsoever and they all stood by and watched as the place went up in smoke. It is now being rebuilt and no wood will be used in the reconstruction to reduce any future fire risk. Each stall holder has to contribute quite a lot of money towards the rebuilding – money

which they don't have. I am loaning Mama Grace some of what she needs and she will pay me back slowly when she starts earning again. We have also started talks on the possibility of partnering with us in a small way in order to raise more money for the charity. The finer details will be worked out probably next visit. Catherine and I will go to her house to have a look at what small stock she has started to build up next Wednesday so that I can bring home stuff to sell for the charity.

Suddenly Elia appeared followed by Johanes. Johanes was really unwell and Elia had to bring him home. Elia then had to go back to school – it is a good 45 minutes' walk and Johanes was in quite a state. He has not been well for several days and I have insisted that he does not go to school tomorrow exams or not. I am really concerned about him as his resistance is getting compromised – we must take him back to DREAM as soon as possible. Jordan was being a little swine about doing his really simple homework.. He was quite capable of doing it but so easily distracted. He was writing with a silly stub of a pencil so I had to insist that he was given a new one. Catherine is fed up with the way the kids lose their stationary but he can't do his work without the necessary tools. I have stuck his name on his pencil in an attempt to encourage him not to lose it.

By 5.30 I had to insist that I left for the dala dala with Mama Grace. We chatted away on our walk to to the bus and on our bumpy way down the road. She was telling me about how uncaring Tanzanian people are towards each other – like that's news to me – I think not. Catherine told me that on Xmas Day she had run out of money to buy bananas so asked an extremely rich banana landowner if she could have a few for the children. The woman said that she would have to ask her husband. Later Catherine saw the husband and asked the same question. The answer came back that she would have to ask his wife. Catherine was furious and I don't blame her. I can't spend time getting angry about this attitude anymore – it take too much of my energy. When we got to the main road I wanted to get off but Mama Grace told the driver to take me one more stop and help me across the main road. So a great argument ensued and I decided that it was easier to just get off and walk.

By the time I reached the lodge I was on my knees. I think I maybe have a touch of what the kids have had so I decided to forego food in favour of a good long shower and some must needed rest. The pressure is on to get things done – two weeks is really not enough time to do everything I need or should be doing but it is what it is so I will just do my best. Julieth's tomorrow so a slightly later start. Wednesday I intend to stay in the lodge all day and chill out. What's the betting that is the day it pours all day.

March 3rd

I felt much better when I woke up this morning. I really felt lousy last night. I slept well due to terminal exhaustion and woke naturally at 8.00am. Patrick from Moshi called me this morning and he said he will come to Ilboru tomorrow and we will go together to see the children and the house. I had hoped for a day off but it will be nice to see Patrick again and he will be driving so I won't have to exert myself overly much. I had a leisurely breakfast and then plodded my way to the main road. It wasn't too hot so I managed to arrive in a reasonable state of repair. Later in the day it got hotter and hotter and strange swirling winds sprung up from nowhere. The heat is intense and apparently in Moshi where Patrick lives it is even hotter. To everyone in the UK who is complaining about the cold – I am jealous. I would do anything to feel cold at the moment – some people are never happy.

We caught the bus to Julieth's Ebeneser and were greeted by a very full on Janita. Julieth of course was nowhere to be seen – she was nearly an hour late – Julieth time again. Janita is living at Ebeneser during the week and attending the little nursery school. Julieth is doing this so that the other children don't feel different and it doesn't seem to be bothering Janita although Julius is not so

happy about this arrangement. Julieth arrived with her Grandmother Coco in tow. They spent a lot of time arguing in Maasai language but it would appear that Coco (100 – reportedly) is being very difficult and keeps wanting to be in different places on a daily basis. She wanders off frequently and gets lost which is driving poor Julieth mad with worry. She said that another old woman had done similarly some months ago and a search party eventually found her miles from her home stripped naked wondering in the hills. Every so often Coco stood up to leave and had to be persuaded to stay a bit longer. Please shoot me if I get to that state. Old age is not a great state of being but at least here the family do try to care for their old folk with compassion. The subject of Coco's burial site was discussed – Coco has stated where she wants to be buried when she dies but given the various family conflicts in Julieth's family, Catherine thinks that this needs to be put in writing with Coco's thumb print. All very difficult.

Janita is now three and a total delight. She is like a little parrot and copies everything that is said and done. She loves to help out with chores, she loves to perform little songs in English and is extremely affectionate. I have posted a short video of her performance on Facebook for anyone interested. I had brought her some lovely little girl clothes which she inspected closely and whooped with delight at anything pink and sparkly. Just like little girls anywhere. She insisted on trying everything on. A little friend was watching all this so I said that Janita should pick one T-Shirt to give to her friend. Janita at first protested loudly but was eventually persuaded to part with one item. Her friend beamed with pleasure and stuffed the top into her little bag before Janita could change her mind. So the afternoon passed by with chatting and laughing. Janita insisted on brushing my already challenged hair for hours telling me I was at the salon so I suffered without protest as my hair became more dishevelled and lank over time. She had a hacking cough and by late afternoon was running quite a temperature so was washed and put to bed with paracetamol. We were persuaded to wait until the older kids got back from school so we could see them. They got back at about 5.30pm. I was a little annoyed with Julieth who proceeded to reel out a list of naughty things they had done recently – not helping out with chores etc. – and the kids were clearly upset and embarrassed by this. Catherine has already spoken to Julieth about this but I will speak to her next time I see her. It's not fair on them and spoils the pleasure in meeting up with us.

We finally made our escape and plodded to the road and onto a bus full of school kids. I got off with Catherine at Sanawari to avoid crossing the road at Ilboru. It is so dangerous especially in the evening when the sun is low in the sky and blinding. I had a quick shower and met up with Sharon for dinner. I decided to watch a movie before going to sleep so watched the Railway Man – I have recently read the book. The film was very different to the book but good to watch.

March 4th

I had another leisurely morning. Patrick was due to arrive from Moshi at 11.00am but finally turned up at 12.30. African time again. It was great to see him again and he seems much happier and more settled these days. His wife and two small boys are living in his house in Kenya near his Mum and he goes most weekends to see them. He has had yet more problems with immigration officials having been very careless about getting his work permits sorted out but now things seem to be working out as his paperwork is finally processed after eight years. Tanzania has rejected a lot of matters relating to the East African Community, to its' detriment I might add, so freedom of movement between the two countries is more difficult than it was before. We headed off to Usalama House and on the way I realised that it was school pick up time for the three little ones so we called Catherine who was delighted that we offered to collect the kids saving her or Anna a long hot walk. The kids were equally delighted when they had been finally rounded up and climbed into the car with great big beams on their faces.

We had lunch and Catherine and Patrick started to plan the house warming party for when we move. Patrick said he would contribute the goat. I said on no account was anyone to buy a live goat for Ismael to "deal with" and so they agreed that the meat would be purchased from the butcher. Totally irrational on my part and when Catherine relayed this to Ismael and the builder later they were nearly crying with laughter. They then started discussing the guest list and said we have to include the village elders. I really feel disinclined to invite these mean-spirited people but if needs must to keep the peace who am I to argue. Also we have to invite our new neighbours – a drunkard on one side and the raving devil-infested woman on the other side. This will be some party – NOT!

Patrick then drove us up to see the new house – he last saw it when it was an empty plot of land. He was very impressed with it and was particularly liking the hot water system. The builders were hard at it preparing the foundations for the walls and soon all will be finally complete to my great relief. The exact moving date has yet to be decided. I still can't quite believe what we have achieved but somehow it has all come together and we really have been very lucky with our team and haven't encountered any really major problems. I would love to do a second house on the same lines but I think age and money are now working against me unless someone comes up with a whole heap of money to do the job. Anyone know any rich and generous millionaires. Again answers on a postcard please.

Patrick was anxious to get going as he wanted to be back in Moshi before dark so we left and made our way into Arusha. He dropped me near the exchange place and went on his way. I decided to purchase some carrot cake to eat with my tea when I go back. I got an extremely good deal on the cake as it was due to be date expired tomorrow. They reduced each slice from 5000/= to 1000/= so I bought two pieces. I had considered scoffing the lot myself but thought better of it and shared it with Racheal when I got back to Ilboru. I sorted out all my various money matters and then had a really long hot shower – it was nice to have a more leisurely evening. I ate dinner with Sharon and got the answer to the question of the "Witch Way". The witch who cuts your tongue out and puts you on the roof is doing this deed in order to have you as a slave working on his/her land. So now we know.

Mike had arranged to call me from home at around 10.00pm my time. After several false starts he finally made the connection. He had called to tell me my Uncle had just died in Austria which was sad to hear. Unfortunately the funeral is in Vienna the day I return from Tanzania so it is totally impossible for me to make it which I am sorry about. I had a pretty disturbed night tossing and turning but that's par for the course these days.

March 5th

Today I went to see Tukae in her house in Tengeru. Sharon walked with me to the main road to stretch her aching muscles after her hike to the waterfalls yesterday. We stopped at a couple of shops on the way and then I ran into Silvester so consequently was late to meet Catherine at Sanawari. I am getting as bad as everyone else round here. We got on an extremely full daladala – Catherine drew the short straw being sat next to a very large Maasai who smelt very bad. A very young girl with a baby got on a few stops later; she was certainly no more than fourteen so giving me more evidence about the importance of the koti mvua lessons. We arrived at Tukae's place but Tukae was nowhere to be seen. It transpired that she had had to take her older sister to the hospital for something. Her sister lost her husband many years ago to a mystery illness and has sunken into complete torpor since then. She doesn't speak, hardly eats and sits staring into space all day crying. Very sad. Her youngest children had to be cared for by the rest of her family. Tukae's mother was also at the house along with an assortment of other relatives.

Tukae finally appeared and rushed round preparing food for everyone. She has lost a lot of weight but is looking good. Finally we persuaded her to sit down and talk and she filled me in on the whole story about the disasters in Austria and the plans for the future. She is a very strong person and Ad is lucky to have her. Poor Antoinetta has really suffered with all the comings and goings but hopefully she will get some longer term stability when Tukae returns to Austria in the summer. I just hope nothing else goes wrong for them.

After lunch we three sat outside and poor Catherine was then subjected to a massive boost in her education. Tukae is much more open about personal matters related to health – in particular women's health. She told us that Tengeru Hospital is now offering free cervical cancer screening and breast checks to all women every Wednesday. This is a Canadian led initiative and seems to be taking off. So sensibly she had taken herself to be checked last week and is awaiting results; she thinks they found a few abnormal cells so is slightly anxious about it. She explained the procedure to Catherine who was totally horrified. She then proceeded to show Catherine somewhat graphic photographs of the procedure at which point I thought Catherine was going to collapse and I thought I was going to die laughing. It then got a whole lot worse. She showed Catherine a totally awful picture of some woman who had developed some sort of cancer of the vulva. At this point Catherine, having somewhat recovered from the shock, demanded that we should go now for the tests. She thoroughly read all Tukae's information and has promised that she will go and get herself checked out as soon as possible. I have said that if she hasn't done it by the time I come again then I will personally frog march her to the hospital. I hope she does what she has promised. Then the subject of HPV injections for young girls came up. I don't know very much about the subject but Sharon, a pharmacist, filled me in later in the evening. Tukae is preparing to take Antoinetta for the job fairly soon and all the reasons were explained to Catherine. This of course totally backed up my previous sex education sessions and Tukae was a great support. So I have asked Catherine to tell Anna that I am not totally bonkers but simply pragmatic and wanting the best for all our kids in terms of health and welfare as they grow into young adults. Poor Catherine – she has really had a battering this visit.

Antoinetta appeared from school at around 5pm. She has grown a lot since I last saw her ten months ago. She is still as lively as ever and remarkably normal given her recent life experiences. We decided that we will go for a meal together on Saturday at Impala as Tukae rarely eats out these days while Ad is in Austria. Tukae's niece then phoned and demanded that Tukae's sister be brought to her house in Njiro so we eventually all piled into her car and headed back to Arusha. We dropped Catherine at Sanawari and Tukae kindly brought me all the way to Ilboru. It was a lovely day and I feel better for having heard the full story from the horse's mouth as it were. I ate again with Sharon having foregone a shower and went to bed. I must have slept very soundly because I missed a call from Mike at some point.

March 6th

It is getting hotter and hotter. It has been well into the thirties today and the temperature is set to climb even higher tomorrow which does not bode well for the dreaded BIG SHOP. I decided to stay put and gather energy for tomorrow so spent a pleasant morning chasing the shade and reading my book. Even in the shade I have managed to turn a brighter shade of pink but no serious damage fortunately. Sharon appeared from her Swahili cooking class with the news that both her husband and son had made the summit of Kilimanjaro. They return tomorrow. By 2.30 it was too hot to remain outside so I retired to my room to do some work. I then took an early shower and went for dinner early in preparation for tomorrow's exertions. Sharon and Annalies joined me for dinner. Annalies is the new manager of the hotel here in Ilboru. She is quite a girl. She is currently going

through quite an acrimonious divorce having been separated from her husband for several years. She seems to really enjoy life here in Tanzania – she arrived 15 years ago following a break up of a relationship and has led a very eventful life here to say the least. Most of what she has done is not for this diary – I could get sued. I think I have led a very sheltered and uneventful life in comparison. Probably just as well. We also talked a bit about corruption at the very highest level. This country is riddled with corruption from the top down and this can make life difficult for people who are not prepared to bribe or in any way succumb to it. One example – Tanzanite One – one of the major mines for Tanzanite was owned by a South African company and somehow or another the President wrested the mine away from the South Africans at a very low price. Lo and behold – the new owner of the mine is the President's son. This sort of thing happens time and time again and does not increase the reputation of the country when it comes to doing business overseas or when seeking aid.

March 7th

I was up early and on the way down to the main road by 9.00am. It was already scorching. I passed Silvester on his way up to Ilboru so he told me to wait for him at the bottom and he would take me into town – a good idea – I am really trying to take care of myself now given the heat and humidity so I am avoiding too much walking unless it is totally necessary. He told me about a project somewhere that advises people on how to make the best of their small plots in terms of growing food. So we will talk to Catherine tomorrow and encourage her to go and visit the project and get ideas. Growing our own greens saves us an enormous amount of money and is excellent nutritionally. He also supplies Ilboru with all the rice they need so he will supply us with 50Kg at a fair price. He will bring it tomorrow when we go to the house.

I found our meeting place near the market and waited ages for Catherine and David and Elia. Our usual wholesaler has gone somewhere far away so we had to find a new one which filled us with dread. Luckily we found someone very close by and they didn't seem to want to cheat us. So it all went remarkably smoothly despite my worst fears. We bought a large tin of NIDO – this is a powdered milk and I suggested that they fortify the porridge for breakfast with it, especially for Johanes. This came out of the extra money we were given by Sharon. We have to be so careful with our expenditure and prices continue to rise overall. Having completed that part of the shopping we all headed into the market – I left my bag with the shopkeeper for safety and felt more relaxed as a result. The market is a mass of humanity all pushing and shoving through the narrow aisles. The range of smells assaults one's nose – most are OK-ish but some are positively nauseating. David and Elia were really helpful and ferried stuff back to the shop to await collection; this meant that none of us had to carry really heavy loads. They are so willing and uncomplaining. UK kids take note please. You could do worse than to learn from those two lads. We got some wonderful pineapples – they are huge and sweet and cost about 60p each. Pears are in season at the moment as are melons. We bought some oranges despite them not being in season – they cost all of 70p for 14 – not bad.

We assembled everything for collection at the wholesaler. The man that Catherine had originally negotiated with didn't show up so we had to wait ages whilst poor Catherine went off to find someone else.

Whilst in the market we were all sent flying. An enormous argument broke out. Some man had borrowed money from a stallholder and hadn't repaid it. This caused a great kerfuffle and the lad was set upon by numerous women until he agreed to pay back what he owed. These skirmishes break out quite regularly and very quickly but they also die down again equally quickly albeit they can be a bit alarming at the time. Finally Catherine reappeared with a transport vehicle so everything

was carefully loaded onto the back with David and Elia. They had to collect 5 sacks of charcoal on the way up. I was dropped off at Ilboru on the way. I was going out with Tukae around 5pm so decided not to go to the house as it would be a real rush to get back and get ready. The temperature today was in the high thirties- everyone is sure that rain is around the corner. There has been more flooding elsewhere in the country and more people have lost their lives. Let's hope that this doesn't happen here.

I had a lovely meal out with Tukae and Antoinetta. We went to a favourite haunt – Impala Hotel – that provides excellent Indian food. Poor Antoinetta is clearly disturbed by all the problems her parents have experienced in the last nine months and threatened to go and live with her sister unless they sort themselves out. I do have a certain amount of sympathy with the child. That aside it was good to just sit and chat with an old friend and catch up on local gossip.. I was home uite early so watched American Sniper and had a phone call with Mike.

March 8th

Today Silvester took me and the rice to the house. I was late getting there as he had to take someone urgently to Arusha airport so I did my usual sitting around waiting act. We got to the house and Catherine was on her own preparing lunch. All the kids were at church and Anna was on her day off. We took some tea and Silvester told Catherine about the project that advises on growing a lot of food in a small space. Grace, David and Joshua appeared and we piled into Silvester's car and went to show him the new house. The dust is horrific now and is lovely shiny car was covered. He was very impressed by our new home and the final part of the wall is well under way together with the chicken house. We will have to increase the height of the wall when we have found some more money from somewhere. Neighbours were all lined up and climbing over the wall. People still think they can wander in and out as they please. This will soon have to stop but for now there is not a lot we can do about it. Wilson and Ismael appeared from nowhere as did another lorry load of blocks which threw up even more dust.

When we got back everyone was home from church and I was sent flying by the stampede to greet me. They are an affectionate and fun-loving bunch. We had lunch and then Catherine and I did some book-keeping. The kids begged for the football so I allowed it on condition that everyone took a large drink of water (35 degrees and rising) and that everyone stopped for a rest and more water after half an hour. This worked quite well. Sundays at the house are really very special. Everyone is relaxed and I just felt like I was in the heart of my family and didn't want it to end. Very special indeed. Elia was playing at Mr. Cool in his shades and we did some silly pictures. Grace kept getting hold of my phone and insisted on taking revolting pictures of your truly. Joshua played most of the afternoon at cooking and making us endless cups of tea and plates of food. Jordan is getting better at not climbing all over me all of the time. It is so hot and he is getting a bit big for that now. He was made to do his homework and sent ages looking for a pencil as he had lost yet another one. Aron was as delightful as ever and Dominic, who had been quite quiet, seemed to cheer up as the day went along. Mercy continues to be loving and sweet and Goodluck the same. Only Johanes blotted his copy book by disappearing. Aron was the only one that noticed he had vanished and was sent to find him. Meanwhile Johanes reappeared from somewhere and was made to apologise to Aron who had run all over the place looking for him.

I spent a little time trying to introduce the idea to the children about how we behave around people with problems or illnesses such as HIV. We are getting concerned about how they will all react when they are finally told about our child with HIV. We are introducing the subject gradually so that when it comes to disclosing this information it won't rock the boat too much. I gathered later from Grace

that two of the children went to Grace after our conversation to check out the information I had given them. Grace is well-informed and very good at talking to the younger ones and they clearly trust her knowledge and opinions. What a fantastic family we have created – especially Catherine and Anna. I am so proud of them all – I sit quietly at the house sometimes just watching what is going on and those quiet moments are precious and blissful for me.

Time flew by and it was time for David and Grace to prepare to go back to school. They clearly hate leaving home for school after the weekend and the pair of them turn into relatively normal teenagers as they find all sorts of reasons to delay the departure. It's really nice to see the pair of them being less than perfect and better still to see them knowing they are being less than perfect with mischievous grins on their faces. Finally they were ready so we said our goodbyes and I went with them on the dala dala as far as Ilboru. I had a small argument with the bus boy who tried to overcharge me for the two kids but he gave in in the end. I then took my life in my hands and crossed the main road without getting totally flattened. I was really late back so had a quick shower to remove the worst of the grime. After dinner I said my goodbyes to Sharon and her husband who are off tomorrow on a wonderful safari. We have agreed to stay in touch and Sharon is considering sponsoring one of the children for their education. I hope this becomes a reality – many people say things when they are here and then go home and forget about it. I have a feeling Sharon won't do that. Busy day tomorrow so I am signing off now.

March 9th

I woke up this morning unable to speak. My voice was a bit croaky yesterday but had completely vanished this morning. It has come back a bit during the day but I can't speak without either squeaking or croaking. I think the dust is the main culprit – it is just awful and every vehicle that passes on the roads kicks the wretched stuff into eyes, ears, nose, mouth and everywhere else. Humidity is now virtually 100% and I cannot understand how we still have no rain despite threatening clouds and continuing intense heat. I long to feel cool again and pile on the sweaters if needs be.

Feeling under par I plucked up the courage to ask a girl who I knew was using Sylvester to go to the airport if I could hitch a ride to the main road. In fact she was going into town first so I was lucky and got a lift the whole way. Being early I killed time by having a cold drink in a café and read the local rag. There was a long article about the increase in assaults on albino people for their body parts recently. A small child was found minus all her limbs recently; witch doctors will pay up to £50,000 for a full set of body parts. This continues to be a total disgrace to the country and the recent increase is being attributed at least in part to the upcoming elections. Senior officials and prospective candidates for parliament are seeking out witch doctors to use their powers and albino parts to bring them luck and good fortune. The whole trade is beyond belief and that educated people can believe in this rubbish is staggering. What is wrong with this bloody country I ask myself?

Anyway – to less terrible things – I finally met up with Catherine and we headed to the bank to pay school fees for next term. Last term Catherine had to queue for six hours to get the fees paid. Some people's children were sent home from school as their poor parents were unable to pay in time due to the fact that the banks closed. Stupid system. The bank was heaving but we only had to wait for about an hour to get the job done. I told Catherine that I complain if I have to wait longer than about five minutes in the bank at home. The heat was intense and my legs felt like lead and Catherine wasn't a lot better. We plodded to McMoody's for a small lunch and then plodded some more to various stationery shops to buy the exercise books the kids need. When buying for nine the load got very heavy even with Catherine plodding along with some on her head. We made it in a

soggy heap to the dala dala and got off at school to go and see the head and director about various issues. Anna was collecting the three little ones so we gave her money for the dala dala and she took some of the books as well. Needless to say neither of the people we wanted to see were there – gone to a funeral was the reason given. Teacher John – an excellent teacher who first encountered at Sotwa Wilson – took time out to talk to us and made copious notes about our various points which he has promised to pass on to the Director and the Head. I have told them they have to stop adding money for various and silly little things because we are not going to pay for all these extras. They need to remember that we are supporting disadvantaged children and any extras times 9 mounts up. There were various other points raised but the most worrying thing arose when we discovered that Mercy, who is generally top of everything and very bright, had performed really badly in a recent Maths exam – she only achieved 36/100 which is unheard of for Mercy who is usually in the high seventies. The step up from Standard three to Standard Four is quite a big one but this still doesn't account for this massive drop in performance. Poor Mercy was summonsed and proceeded to cry. Teacher John was excellent with her whilst trying to ascertain what the problems are. I suspect that her teacher is perhaps not very good and Mercy is perhaps not good at saying if she doesn't understand something. We will keep a close eye on things and hope that this is just a blip and that she will pick up again.

We then went on our various ways. I took my courage in both hands and managed to get back to Ilboru by foot. The route is very hilly and dusty and involved crossing several streams. I managed it somehow – sheer gritted teeth I think. I was not in a good way when I got back and had a good cry to release the tension and felt very sorry for myself. Self-pity is not a good state of being but I did really feel very sorry for myself indeed. I drank loads of water, had two hot cups of tea and a good shower and felt a bit more human after that. I shall go for food early this evening and then go to bed with paracetamol and a hot drink and hope to feel better tomorrow for my last day at the house. We have requested that the children are not kept at school late so that I can see them for the last time this visit.

March 10th

I am still not able to speak without croaking or squeaking. My throat is sore, my nose is streaming and I have earache now as well. This all bodes badly for the flight home on Thursday. The joys of international travel. Usually the temperature at this time of year is mid to late twenties as opposed to mid to late thirties as it is at the moment. Ismael still predicts rain tomorrow but I think he may be wrong. Time will show.

I went to the house with Silvester – walking for me is not an option at the moment. He then made contact with the advisors on growing food in a small space and has passed Catherine's phone number to them. They will hopefully visit at some point and will not charge us as we are a charity. That's a first in this neck of the woods. We spent most of the rest of the morning preparing the green veg for lunch and for some to take to Mama Grace tomorrow. The remnants are chopped up finely for the chickens. It is slow work but very relaxing. Anna set off on foot in the middle of the day to fetch the little ones from school. I have insisted that when it is this hot they should use the dala dala both ways or they will all peg out. When they got back we sat and had our lunch – Butu thinks that the best way to eat is to sit by me and wait while I chew up my food and then give it to him in a sticky goo. He is so sweet and getting very spoilt. He stopped out last night so Catherine lost a lot of sleep worrying about where he had gone. I know that one from my own cat experiences with Lena. He plays wildly with the children – he races after them trying to catch strings attached to their legs; he is more like a little dog than a cat.

The older children came home from school early as it was my last day at the house. We had an interesting discussion about genetics in particular about albinism. Goodluck had thought that albinism was a kind of illness or plague so we put him straight on that one. I don't know the ins and outs of the genetics of albinism but tried to demonstrate the dominant/recessive gene thing to explain how it comes about. Mercy wanted to know how we know all these things so then followed explanations about genetic research. The subject led on to issues of difference and how we treat people who are different to ourselves. This led on to caring for people if they are not well or in some way different. This is part of our planned approach leading up to disclosure about our HIV child. All very interesting and the children seem genuinely interested in learning this stuff in a way that they are able to understand. Which reminds me – I intend to write to the publishers of the set text books used by the children and tell them that the way stuff is presented is really poor and they need to do something about it. An example - find the length of the perimeter of the square above. The square above is actually a rectangle. The solving of mathematical problems is almost impossible when couched in confusing and unclear language. Etc etc.

I ascertained from Catherine later that Goodluck and Mercy, bright little sparks that they are, had been questioning why the subject of caring and all that stuff had come up twice recently. They have clearly got the wind up and Mercy has stated to Catherine that no doubt we will eventually get round to telling them what is going on. Goodluck said that he didn't believe anyone in the house was sick and so why did we continue going on about caring for sick people. I hope we haven't worried him unduly. They are pretty quick our kids so I hope our cunning plans don't backfire on us.

Ismael and Wilson appeared around 4pm. The work on the house is nearly finished. I tried to get some idea of what it will cost for the last little bits and also for the actually moving. We also need to buy two beds for the guest room so need a price for these. There then was quite a lot of blah blah going on in Swahili and it got quite heated. Catherine then told me that our stupid neighbours (the ones with the "possessed" woman) had taken down their hedge now that the wall is up. This apparently means that they have encroached on our land behind the wall. I think it's only a tiny strip which apparently has to remain there legally and seems to have caused a right furore up in the village. The Chairman was called and the neighbour protested his ignorance of the matter when threatened with a police order and went into shock. I gather it will be sorted out one way or another so decided not to get overly involved or annoyed. I did suggest to Catherine that maybe they should tell the neighbours that I am actually a witch and see if that frightens them into cooperating. She was seriously unamused by this idea. Elia and Mercy were worried that I meant I actually was a witch so I launched into a jokey diatribe about a new business venture. I suggested that I should open a school for witches and that this course would last for two years. I would charge lots of money for the course and at the end the graduate witches would have a graduation party and certificates. After initially looking at me in horror, Elia joined in and wondered whether I should have a special witch name. He then re-enacted something had seen on TV somewhere that was to do with witches and had us all in tucks. I think the three adults have decided that I have finally gone completely off my trolley. I tried to explain that really there is no such thing as a witch – that it's all in the mind but they remain unconvinced. These strange beliefs are deeply entrenched but I think I should challenge them. I told them about Hallowe'en in the UK so now they are convinced that the entire UK is crackers.

The two guys said their farewells and it was time for me to leave. I said goodbye to the children and Anna and walked down the lane with my escort of three plus Catherine. We stopped to chat with our rich neighbour's house girl and children and I was offered a lift to the main road by one of the drivers which I gratefully accepted. We had to wait for a couple of minutes (actually 15 minutes)

and I eventually got back to Ilboru pretty late yet again. It is getting very quiet at the lodge now as they move into low season. Still no sign of rain despite Ismael's prophesy so the heat carries on. Tomorrow we are visiting Mama Grace at her home.

March 11th

I met Catherine at the main road at 10.30. We had a very hot walk – not very far I was assured – to Mianzini. We walked very slowly as we were early and the heat was worse than ever. I do hate being permanently drenched in sweat and then rang Mama Grace to come and find us. It transpired that we then had to get on a Dala dala for quite some distance but got to our destination eventually. We dashed for some shade and Mama Grace sent her son to meet us. She lives with her son who is training to be a tour operator. Her daughter was back from college for a week – she is training to be a doctor. She has raised the two of them on her own and has worked hard to put them through college. She has a sweet little house and a small piece of land in what is now quite a well to do area but which was pretty much bush when she first went there 15 years ago. The area is very different our village – she can leave the house unlocked and can leave her little stall at the end of the road unmanned and nothing bad will happen.

She had gathered together the items I had asked for and had set up a little display of things for me to look at and I chose a few more things to bring home and sell. She got a call from the little shop opposite her little stall so we went with her to serve a customer. There is a big volunteer house close by so she gets some custom from that. The young Dutch guy bought a few bits from her. He was flying home that afternoon. He had not had the best of time during his two months stay. He had lost his passport, although he did find it again but not until after he had reported it to the police. A young male volunteer from Holland had died in the house from a heroin overdose – accidental he thought – which was very traumatic for everyone. He had got hold of the stuff in Zanzibar apparently. A real tragedy, not least for his parents who had had to come out to take home his body. He had also got involved in a near riot in town and had to flee from the trouble. This was something to do with dala dala drivers striking because the authorities had decided to shut down many of the usual bus stands which upset them. Any dala dala drivers that continued to work from the new stands were set upon. It only lasted a few hours but was not pleasant at the time.

We had a nice lunch and then set too to do our business. I first sorted out exactly what I was taking home and sorted the payments for that. We then sorted out the terms for repayment of my loan to Mama Grace. She will start to repay as soon as she is back in the Maasai market. She will pay a small amount each month and more if she can afford it. Catherine will collect the money from her and keep a record of repayments. Yet another job for her. I hope it works out and that Mama Grace sticks to her word – I think she will but there is always a bit of a question mark in my head where business here is concerned. We wrote out a little agreement and we both signed it. Finally we sorted out some prices for Analies at Ilboru and Mama Grace will come tomorrow afternoon with some samples. I showed Analies what I had bought and also took some pictures of other items. I hope mama Grace gets a little custom from the lodge – it will certainly help her to get back on her feet.

The son showed us around the little plot and seemed to want to show off his knowledge so we had a bit of lecture about bananas. They do not regenerate by seed. A palm takes about one year to grow and give fruit and then it is cut down and the little side shoot is allowed to grow on in its place. He also showed us some very old looms that Mama Grace used to produce cloth from when the children were small. They were very complex and very old. Mama Grace said that it's not worth producing cloth this way anymore due to cheap imports from abroad – primarily India. Same old

story everywhere. When it was time to go Mama Grace presented Catherine with a huge, and I mean huge, bunch of bananas for the family. Goodness knows what it weighed but I certainly couldn't lift it. So how to get it back to the main road and onto the dala dala? Simple! Mama Grace had her son hoist the sack onto her head and set off at pace – scorching heat notwithstanding. We toddled along behind moaning and groaning and she got to the road five minutes before us. How do these women do this stuff? It puts us to shame. Her son managed to hijack a dala dala and we said our goodbyes. Rather than have to get off at Mianzini we negotiated a price to take us plus bananas to the lodge (less than £2.00) so rolled up at the lodge in our rather unwestern form of transport. The guard looked horrified. Catherine and I had a cold drink and showed Anelies our purchases and pictures. She will meet with Mama Grace tomorrow afternoon just before I leave. We then managed to persuade a piki piki to take Catherine and bananas back to the house. She apparently arrived back totally covered in dust and looking like a monkey.

I started my packing, had a shower and a really not nice dinner. I watched a short movie and went to bed. Another night of tossing and turning dammit.

March 12th

Today is my last day in Africa for this visit. I am always sad to leave but this visit has been a week shorted than usual so time has raced by. But I will be glad to get home to cooler weather as the heat has been relentless. I went late to breakfast and thought I would have a large one to keep me going for the day. So, I ordered poached eggs. I have rarely tasted anything nastier than what appeared on my plate. The eggs were solid and covered in some horrible pink sauce – maybe prawn cocktail sauce – and were totally inedible. I don't know what Annelies is doing with the food at the lodge but she needs to sort it out as the reputation will go down the toilet very quickly unless she addresses it. Ad's cooking was excellent; his menu was varied and large and many local people came from outside to eat in the restaurant. Still, I suppose it's not my problem but it would be sad to see the place slide.

I spent the morning trying to organise myself with packing, catching up on various bits of work and general faffing around until about 1.00pm. I went and sat in the shade by the pool and Catherine appeared a bit later. She was swiftly followed by Mama Grace who had come to see Annelies about supplying things for the gift shop in the lodge. She was dressed up to the nines and when I took a photo of her she stated that she looked like the wife of the vice-president. We spent time chatting and eventually I went in search of Annelies who was nowhere to be found. Racheal told me she had been called away to town on an emergency. I texted her and she said she was at the police station and didn't know how long she would be. So poor Mama Grace had made the trip for nothing but hopefully she will make another appointment as Annelies has promised she will try and help her if she can. At about 4.30pm we got a text from Ismael who announced that a small amount of rain was falling up on the mountain. We then got a few large drops and Catherine insisted we went to my room before we got soaked. Needless to say it had stopped within a minute or so and the humidity has risen a few more notches. I changed and shut my bags and we went to reception to await Silvester for my ride to the airport. He appeared with Annelies so I had a few minutes to hear what had happened. It's too long a story to tell now but fraud, dishonesty and threats to kill were involved. All par for the course in this neck of the woods. Annelies then made my day by asking me what I did to keep my neck and décolletage so smooth and wrinkle free; I think she needs glasses but it kept me purring for a few hours.

Catherine and I said our farewells without any tears for a change. We are getting better at our partings – practise makes perfect I suppose. I entertained Silvester with the school for witches story and he was going to go back to tell his kids to work hard so that they would get the results needed to

qualify for entry to this illustrious school. We decided that science was a very necessary subject as it would be needed when learning how to change dust into water and similar tricks. We nearly collided with a herd of goats on the road. I had just been ranting on about idiots on totally unlit roads without any lights so we then proceeded to invent a collar for goats that would have a solar panel to charge little lights for use at night. Full of good ideas we were. Check in went as slowly as ever at Kilimanjaro airport. I hadn't eaten since breakfast so had a sandwich and chatted to a fellow smoker until boarding time. At Dar I thought I was going to end up with a whole bank of seats to myself but at the very last minute a family with two small kids, reeking of sick, were shown to the seats. The Purser must have seen my face and offered to move me – I accepted gratefully. The flight was long, boring, pretty sleepless and punctuated by a small child who screamed at the top of his voice for considerable periods of time. I felt like murdering the little pest – all sympathy for the parents went out of the window; I turn into an antisocial, mean-spirited rat bag on long haul flights.

Mike met me in Birmingham and I was greeted by pelting, icy rain and winds. My promises regarding not moaning about being cold ever again lasted all of 10 seconds as we splashed our way back to the car with me in sandals and frozen feet. We got back to Leicester and dear Charlie, who had miraculously survived my absence was delighted to see me as I was to see him. As I write these last lines on Saturday I can reflect back on my latest visit to my lovely family with a smile on my face and warm memories of the loving, calm and fun-filled household at Usalama House. They are a wonderful bunch of people, adults and children alike and I know their lives will continue happily until I next return to them in a few months' time. We will then pick up again where we left off and it will be as if I had never left. Tutaonana baadaye – see you soon. Karibu Tanzania- welcome to Tanzania. Nakupenda sana – I love you.