

December 2005 Christmas

Merry Christmas 2005 to everyone!!!!

Santa came this year and brought lots of wonderful gifts – the best being warmth, sunshine and lots of friends. Christmas in Zanzibar is much different – the stress and last minute rush just doesn't happen here. This is a predominantly Muslim country but there are a number of Christians and quite a few ex-pats and tourists. The hotels had their Christmas lights blinking at night and there were two or three small shops where we could buy decorations and small fake trees. Many of the ex-pats leave and either go home or on holiday so I had a small Christmas Eve party for some of us who had stayed behind. Everyone brought some food, drink and a wrapped gift for our Yankee Grab!!! We all imagined that we were sitting inside a warm toasty house with a fire in the fireplace in New England – the snow was falling outside and we were drinking egg nog after eating a turkey dinner. (That was stretching the imagination quite far as it was sunny and very warm here)

People here acknowledge Christmas and as I was shopping last week a number of my favorite vendors gave me a small zawadi (gift) which was very nice. And as I walked through the streets people that know me would say Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. I bought a few small gifts for some of the people at ZAPHA+ - I gave Bi Saide, our nurse, a small 2006 diary. My goodness – she was absolutely thrilled with it. The Muslim holiday which is most like Christmas is Eid that is at the end of Ramadhan. They also give gifts but they usually give food – like a kilo of rice or a chicken – to a neighbor or someone who is in need. It's a lovely tradition and nice that they don't just buy gifts for the sake of shopping.

Africa and Zanzibar are everything that I ever dreamed of. I had always imagined that I would live someplace quite comfortable (I didn't expect to be living in a movie set though) and have lots of friends from all over the world come over and we would have fascinating discussions about anything and everything. Well – we had 20 people who represented countries from all over – Sweden, Britain, Norway, Cameroon, Rwanda, Uganda, Germany, Zanzibar and of course America. I live in the most fabulous place in Zanzibar and I am still the most fortunate woman in the world.



Oh – we laughed so hard – it was wonderful!!!! Here Sabriya is trying to decide which “gift” she may want to choose for her turn. Isn't my little Christmas tree beautiful?? On the right are Sabriya, Lisa and Mzee. Sabriya and Lisa are Americans who were staying at my friend's hotel and ran into Florence – a friend of mine from UK. They are working in Zambia doing research on HIV/AIDS and came to Zanzibar for holiday and so Florence had them come to the party. They're both students here on a fellowship from the US – isn't serendipity a magnificent thing?



Farouque had chosen a gift under the tree and it was Farid's Swahili newspapers!!!! Farouque was doing all he could to pass them on (as he had already read them) and finally talked Sabriya into taking them. And here Farouque finally got the gift that he REALLY wanted – a small tool kit. Now Farouque is a dress designer who lived in London for 30 years – I'm not sure what he'll use the tools for but he was happy. David was the one person who chose the most gifts as others kept "taking" his – here he is with his final gift – the globe and pen so now he will know just where he's located at all times. It was everyone's first time playing Yankee Grab and we had a marvelous time.



Victoria chose the Christmas kanga that Farouque had made (he's a dress designer) – Victoria is Patrick's sister visiting from Norway with her boyfriend. and here's Farid, Florence and Helen – Farid designed and made that dress for Helen – he is Zanzibari and publishes a local newspaper. Florence is a film director/producer from Cameroon who directed our film in June about the six ex-pat women who migrated to Zanzibar. Helen is my lovely British friend who is director of Chumbe Island, a resort and coral park reserve. And here's Helen and Patrick with her beautiful scarf that was made by another friend of ours. Patrick is Rwandan and here for a year working with DANIDA.



Dinner was great – all kinds of different dishes – here’s my German friend Heidi. She’s the project manager for the ARV (anti-retroviral) startup for Clinton Foundation and we’ve become very close. Her contract has ended and she’s decided to go back to Germany – she’ll leave next week and I’m going to miss her terribly. And here is my Zanzibari friend Mzee helping with the dishes (I just HAD to get a photo of a proper Muslim male doing dishes). Mzee is with ZEDO (Zanzibar Enterprise Development Organization) one of the NGOs that I’m working with. He’s with the Ministry of Agriculture and we’re hoping to put together a project of growing vegetables here on the island. Right now most vegetables are brought in from the mainland. There is a big market here for them with the hotels but the local farmers are hesitant to grow something new. Mzee is an expert and will help to train the farmers throughout the entire project as soon as we get funding. This will help the local farmers and we also hope to involve PLHAS (people living with HIV/AIDS) to eat healthier food and also to be able to make some money.



So – on Christmas Day Heidi and I drove up the coast to her favorite resort in Paje. It’s owned by a Japanese woman, Saori, who is wonderful – she even handed out Christmas cards to all of the guests!!! We sunned, walked, chatted and read. There we are with the Masai – they are noted for being wonderful watchman and often work at the various resorts. Many Masai have come to live in Zanzibar selling their beaded jewelry and other things in Stonetown. They are incredibly regal and friendly. They did a traditional dance this day where they sang and jumped which is a sight to see!!! Saori then served them a big meal to all of them which impressed me so much because often ex-pats don’t treat their staff all that well. She had set up a table and two chairs off to the side for the “elder” (he was maybe 27) and his wife (she’s all the way on the right) and then Saori and her husband sat at a separate table away from the main table. I’m looking forward to going up to Paje more often and learning about the Masai from Saori and the others.

There is so much to learn here and it’s fascinating - a different culture, different people. When I had returned from a year in Africa in 1975 I believed that I had much to learn from the Africans and I am so grateful that I have the opportunity to be here. The people here are amazing – dignified, kind and generous. I’m still working hard with ZAPHA+ (Zanzibar Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS). We are going to have a big meeting in January with our donors to coordinate our funding. It’s frustrating at times but it’s the most rewarding work that I’ve ever done. We have hired a new coordinator who starts January 1 and I can’t wait. I will send an email

sometime in February bringing everyone up to date as to what we've been doing and also tell you how Sauti za Busara went which is the big music festival in early February. I went last year and it was tremendous!!!!

I hope that everyone had a safe and wonderful holiday. I love getting emails and cards and letters – I check my PO Box every day (yes that's a hint). It is such a thrill to open the box and see an envelope inside – it makes my day.

Love to everyone

Kathryn