

March 6, 2009

Hi everyone,

I have been living in Zanzibar since September 2004 and this is the second year that I traveled to Bangkok for my annual medical checkup which was very positive. I had 3 MRIs done and no new lesions which is wonderful – my MS has not progressed. I feel like I have been rejuvenated with that news. I have more energy than I've had in a few years and I believe that much of it has to do with getting lots of Vitamin D from the sun and living a good life. It is wonderful to know that I am living and doing the work that I am meant to.

This email is now being sent to many different people all over the world, and often forwarded to others. If you do not know my background and are interested in learning about me, please visit my personal website <http://www.kathrynsutton.com>. If you no longer want to be on this mailing list please let me know – I understand how time consuming it can be to try to read newsletter type emails. But please look at the photos even if you don't have time to read all the text

Bumrungrad International Hospital



This photo is from my last year's visit but it shows how beautiful Bumrungrad International Hospital is – it's like a blend of Super Stop & Shop and the Four Seasons Hotel. There are staff everywhere who are smiling and ready to help. I love the photo of the water glasses that are in all offices. There is always water available to drink and it's just a small touch but depicts the hospitality that is extended by the Thais at Bumrungrad. I could go on forever about my enthusiasm about Bumrungrad, the doctors and the efficiency (and the affordable costs). Let me just say that this year was a good experience for me. I saw the same doctors that I did last year. They told me that they like working at Bumrungrad - because they have such a great support staff they can focus on being doctors, not managing a practice themselves. Bumrungrad is expanding – they now have three buildings right next to each other which makes it very easy to see a doctor or get a procedure done. I went to an internist about a cough and sinus problems - she immediately sent me downstairs for a chest x-ray and a sinus x-ray. I then saw a sinus expert who diagnosed a deviated septum (minor) and he then phoned an allergist and set up an appointment for me to see her the next morning. I stayed in a hotel nearby and walked to the hospital every morning for 5 days. I had MRIS, x-rays, work done on my teeth, eye tests for my MS and many other procedures and checkups.

President Obama has been talking about setting up a database for health care records in the US and I know that some people are concerned about their privacy issues. I can no longer afford my health insurance and am consistently denied private health insurance because I have MS. But I can't lie and hide that from my medical records. At Bumrungrad absolutely everything is on the computer so no matter which doctor I visit, they can look up my records on the computer and know everything about me. It is so much easier than my carrying my health records around with me and trying to give each different doctor a summary of my history. At Bumrungrad the doctors can easily talk with each other and I never have to wait days or weeks to get a test result or a referral. I will be going to Bumrungrad every year for my medical checkup and if anything does happen to me I plan on going there to be treated.

Planting rice in Phrao



Then I flew up north to Chiang Mai and spent ten days with my youngest son, JD. It was wonderful and of course I was hungry to listen and learn about the Thai people. We stayed with friends in a small village and went and planted rice with the farmers one day. It's very hard work but it was interesting to see how farming is done in Thailand compared to Zanzibar. I was very aware that I was a tourist in Thailand and so was only able to experience things on a surface level. But a few things stood out – first, Thailand has very good irrigation systems for their farms. I had been told that the King many years ago chose to focus on agriculture so that the people would have enough food for themselves. JD and I were driving for 3 days up towards the Burmese border and I kept asking him “So when do we get to the poor villages?” Now that’s not to say that there aren’t very poor villages in Thailand – there are but it seems that they are in drought areas. Thailand is able to have good irrigation systems because they have water flowing from the mountains. What can be done for areas with no mountains? Zanzibar is quite flat and although we are able to dig wells and find water we do not have enough. I’m particularly interested because we are beginning a water project in Zanzibar in Kendwa Village and so we have many questions and much to learn.

Visiting with JD in Chiang Mai and the trip back home to Zanzibar



JD has a motorbike and we zipped around Chiang Mai on that every day. We went to a great “night market” where you can stop and get a foot massage (oh I do love many things about Thailand). Then we rented a car and drove up north into the mountains for a few days. It was absolutely gorgeous and wonderful for me to have some time off to relax and spend it with my son. I really enjoy being “mom” to my boys. Keith is now a psychologist in San Francisco and so happy with his life. He is happily married and loves where he lives and his work. JD loves Asia and will probably be based there for a very long time. He has lived there for 4 years, has had some interesting careers and is now a deep sea diver working off of oil rigs - he is an adventurer and loves his work. He is flying out today (his 28th birthday) to Angola where he will be working for the next two years. He plans on working two months on and having one month off. He hopes to come to visit me in Zanzibar which would be his first time – that will be exciting. On the right is my annual photo of Mt Kilimanjaro from the airplane. This is when I know that I’m close to home and my heart starts beating loudly with anticipation of returning to Zanzibar.

My heart belongs in Zanzibar



The next morning I was doing yoga to the sunrise and lo and behold – there was a beautiful rainbow to welcome me back to Zanzibar!!!! I love living here more than anything in the whole world. I believe that Zanzibar is one of the most fascinating and unique places on earth. There is a dalla dalla (local bus) overloaded on top with furniture. And here are some young boys that were playing with their home made cars on the way to our training plot for our farming project. I am overwhelmed every day with the amazing energy and entrepreneurial spirit of many Zanzibaris.

Sauti za Busara 2009



I returned home in time for Sauti za Busara, our annual music festival which is held in the Old Fort. As usual it was magnificent – if any of you are interested in visiting Zanzibar, February for Busara is a great time of year to come. Bi Kidude is our most famous local taarab singer – she must be in her 90's but let me tell you she has incredible spunk and energy. I have a lot to learn from her about enjoying life one day at a time. Along the sides of the crowd were various stalls selling local goods. There are hand bags, clothes made from kanga material (local cloth with beautiful designs), sandals and other things. There are more and more products that are made in Zanzibar and the sellers are very proud of their work. That does not mean that all of them have the capacity to produce on a large scale or even the desire to become an “exporter”. I try very hard to think like a Zanzibar rather than an American who would like to alleviate world poverty in one fell swoop.

Koani Farming Project and the children



I have been so busy with my work since I've returned and I'm in heaven. I won't talk too much about the details as I'm planning on sending out a specific email about each project and I'll also be updating the [Participate Now!](#) website to include the budgets and reports for our projects. Suleiman is the Koani farming project manager (he's the tall man in the white shirt in the center photo). Suleiman has done a fine job of being very transparent since the beginning of our project and including many people from the community. Bwana shamba (the local agricultural officer) spent much of the last 10 days out in Koani working with our seven farmers. We went out to visit each of their farms to see how they were progressing before we had a five day training for nursery production, vegetable plantings, fertilizer, compost and cooking and storing vegetables. Most of the farmers live far from the main road so we went on Suleiman's piki piki (motorbike) over the muddy and rutted small roads and paths. And everywhere we went there were children so I was very happy. We are trying to do things a little differently – usually donors organize trainings but often then the people are expected to implement what they have learned on their own. I know for myself that I always have many questions after I have been to a class or training. It's been important for me to find someone who can help me to put into practice the lessons I learned. We are only half way through our project – much of our focus is now on monitoring and learning what is important for the next step. Suleiman, Bwana Shamba and I will be visiting the farmers to see what they need – advice, guidance, emotional support, an ear to listen to their ideas?

Koani Farming Project and local hospitality



We were out at our “training plot” one day and it started pouring rain (torrential) so we did what all good Zanzibaris do – we moved under some kind of shelter and talked to each other. But the winds shifted and so we walked over to a house and Mwaka took us in even though she had never met us before. The hospitality in this country just overwhelms me. I took this photo of Mwaka and her children, printed it out and brought it to her the next day. I take and print lots of photos. Photographs are often taken for granted by foreigners but I have found that they are treasured by people here. Years later I may visit their home and find one of my photographs on the wall!!!!

Koani Farming Project - Maps, Photos and Lessons Learned



Issa is one of our hardest workers – the great thing is that we did practical training, not just theory. I actually used the hoe myself (wouldn't want to do that all day) and I learned just a very little of what the life of the rural farmer in Zanzibar is like. There is Issa with his map – I love maps – they are helpful to get a true understand of our surroundings. On the last day Suleiman and I showed the participants and the sheha (local mayor) the photographs that I took of each phase of the project so far. I take photos each day and “tell” the story of my experiences. Many were excited to see documentation of their farms, children and their lives. The sheha is a lovely woman who works very hard. I would often pass by her house to greet her and she would be sitting outside going over papers or meeting with the locals about life in Koani. She was very happy that she was able to see the photos of our project – she said “Now I understand all that you've done and I can easily tell anyone who wants to know”. One of the greatest lessons we are learning with this project is to have good communication and to be open in our collaboration with the local community.

I am happy to be back home and working for [Participate Now!](#). I, along with many Americans, am frightened about the economic situation. I have not raised much money at all yet this year and I have to decide what to do. I, personally, received less than \$3,000.00 during 2008 as “management fees” for the two projects I've been implementing. I have not taken a salary as the director of [Participate Now!](#) and do not plan to until I am assured that our projects are well funded. I have canceled my health insurance and deferred my school loans which I found very difficult to do as I have always paid my bills even when money was tight. My living expenses are very little here in Zanzibar and I am even learning from our farmers how to grow some of my own food!!! I have to learn along with everyone else how to be industrious and creative to get through these next few years.

It was suggested to me that maybe I should get a part time job or do some consulting for others. Yes - that is an option but then I'm not doing what I am meant to do. I have only so many hours in the day and if I spend it doing accounting or consulting then I'm not inspiring and influencing in the ways that I find most effective. I thought long and hard and decided that my “job” right now is to be the best director of [Participate Now!](#) that I can be – I am not going to give up before the miracle happens. I will update the website, post the year end financials, write some more emails about our work, hopefully hold a fund raiser at my house here in the next month or so and do what I do best – network with others, learn all that I can and link people together who can benefit from knowing each other and sharing their knowledge and experience. Times are very hard and they will become more difficult before they improve. My priority is to change international development and I am doing that by learning from our practical experiences in the field. We are making changes and learning lessons that will help many people in the future.

I learned a very important lesson about myself this week. On our last day of training we cooked tomatoes and made chutney, tomato puree and catsup that were put into jars. The next night I had some of our trainers from the Ministry of Agriculture to my house for dinner in appreciation for their work. I was thinking out loud and said “Hmmm... the farmers will need jars for their tomato products if they choose to make them – maybe we can organize some people to donate jars to

the farmers". Suleiman looked at me and said "Kathryn, the farmers are very resourceful in getting what they need when they need it". The lesson I learned is that I am an American at heart and my first instinct is to see the "problem" and try to come up with the grand "solution" to "help those people". And that is what has to change – the attitude that I have and that other donors have. "Those people" have so much to teach me – I'm not saying that they don't need help but I'm not sure that they need hand outs – that they need to become recipients. I started [Participate Now!](#) in January 2008 specifically because I have seen that most people, including myself, do not want to be recipients but want to have a voice in their destiny and their daily existence. I need to learn how to accomplish that – to listen and learn from the people who want to participate in raising the quality of their lives.

Please visit our website [Participate Now!](#) to learn more about our foundation. Our main objective is to do small-scale projects with lasting impact. We are grateful for any support at all that you can give us. Thank you for taking the time to read this email.

Participate Now!
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Kathryn