

Bangkok/Bali

February 23, 2011

Good morning to all,

I want to write about my experience at Bumrungrad Hospital in Bangkok and also in Ubud Bali. I have been gone from Zanzibar since early January and everyone is still working hard there although as usual, things move very slowly. We are still in the process of getting the bore hole dug in Kendwa and hopefully that will be finished soon. Then we can move forward to get piping and taps to complete the project and have water available for the villagers of Kendwa.

I am sending this email only to close friends of mine rather than my entire list as this is more of a personal email than an informative one about our Participate Now! projects in Zanzibar.

Molly's First Birthday



I flew from Bangkok to San Francisco to meet my granddaughter Molly before I had my surgery. She is utterly gorgeous and a happy little girl. I loved spending time with her - holding her, watching her laugh and how she so enjoyed staying in the moment with awe and wonderment. She was just beginning to walk while I was there and it was a joy to see what great parents Keith and Alanna are. The center photo is of Alanna's family - her dad, mom and brother. I am glad that they live nearby and see Molly often - it's good for her to be surrounded by family. I was there for her first birthday and as you can see she was thoroughly enjoying her first huge cupcake!!

Surgery at Bumrungrad Hospital in Bangkok



These are my photos from past years as I didn't take any this year. I love Bumrungrad Hospital and wish there were a way to copy this model to the US. I'm told that the Mayo Clinic is the closest model there is in the US. I'm happy to report that my MRIs were good – I have no new lesions and so my MS is stable at the moment. My OB/GYN examined me and said that I have a fallen cervix and strongly suggested a hysterectomy. Now, I have been told this by doctors in America but I have no health insurance so therefore it was not an option to have surgery done in the US. I have been denied health insurance in America time and again because I have MS. I asked the doctor how much it would be and the hospital estimated it at \$4,000.00. I gave them that as a deposit and told my doctor that I have no insurance and I had saved my money for the operation. At Bumrungrad the doctors work part time which is wonderful for them as they don't have to carry the costs of an office, staff, etc. They are able to come to the hospital and do what they do best and they can set their own fees. She had told me that I would have to stay in the hospital for two days and my son JD came down from Chiang Mai where he lives to stay with me.

The first thing I did was have a total health screening – this is a service that the hospital provides to anyone and there were a few hundred people there the day I went. The cost is between \$300 and \$600 depending which screenings you have done. I had the cheapest with my vitals checked, bloodwork done, an EKG, a chest x-ray, sonogram checking my liver, spleen and kidneys, mammogram and GYN exam. It was efficient chaos and the staff was amazing as usual. They had people from all over the world (the Muslim women were given caftans to wear rather than the pants and tops) and translators to assist people to understand what was happening. At the end of the day I met with a doctor who went over everything with me – the best part is that I have been coming to Bumrungrad for 4 years now so all of my records were on the computer for her to check. My OB/GYN spoke with my neurologist prior to the surgery and she said that she would be available in case there were any issues concerning my MS – how cool is that!

I checked into the hospital – the room took my breath away – outside my window was a garden with a gazebo that patients could visit. There were two beds, a large flat screen TV on the wall, flowers in a vase and two sofas with blankets and pillows for family. It is the custom in Thailand for families to stay with the patients during their hospital stay. The nurse came in and brought JD food even though I couldn't eat anything. My operation went smoothly and the nurses were incredibly kind. They treated me with self-respect and dignity and never once seemed irritated with me. The staff at Bumrungrad are almost all women and I know that it is looked upon as very honorable to work there as the hospital has such a good reputation.

Now – the best part – when I left the hospital they totaled my bill and gave me a refund of \$500.00!!!! Why oh why can't that happen in America? The Americans that I talk to are so frightened of not having

health insurance as they are afraid they will lose everything they own because of the high costs of medical care. Does anyone ask why? Why do my MRIS cost \$14,000.00 in Boston and only \$1,400.00 in Bangkok? The machines are the same, the staff are both competent, the doctors are well trained. What is the rationale behind the AMA and the health insurance companies to bleed the people unnecessarily? It's so sad that the government in the US allows this to carry on when there is a solution. It is one that is being accomplished successfully in Thailand, India and even Mexico. Yes, of course there are incompetent hospitals and doctors everywhere in the world – why do Americans think that their health care system is the only competent one? I would like to see the evidence that proves that – I think it would be difficult to find.

I have been able to acquire health insurance in Tanzania for \$1,700.00 a year. Now of course the health care is different than other countries but we are getting more and more foreign doctors who are very good. And I am covered for any emergencies in other countries – my greatest fear has been getting into a car accident in America. How sad that is.

Recuperating at Pintu Merah in Ubud Bali



I have come to realize that I have wonderful karma and I try very hard to appreciate every moment of my life and be open to whatever walks in front of me. Well – one day while I was waiting to see my doctor at Bumrungrad I met Rachel, who is an American living in Hong Kong with her husband John, who is British. We chatted for about 10 minutes (as usual I did most of the chatting) and I gave her my card. Two days later she emailed me and invited me to recuperate at her villa in Ubud, Bali!!!! She was also having surgery and we were hoping to recover together. Sadly, she had some complications and had to stay in Bangkok for treatment but she insisted that I go to Ubud by myself. I had been in Ubud a few years ago and have a special affinity for it so it was with great pleasure that I said “yes”.

Above is a view of the villa from the lower gardens and the pool that I have been swimming in every day. On the right is Libby, Rachel and John's cat, who has kept me company during my time here. Their home is truly a Shangrila – the gardens are green and lush – something that I often hunger for after the lack of it in Zanzibar. The book collections are extensive and eclectic and the artwork is as diverse as I have ever seen. John and Rachel are well traveled and obviously love their home in Ubud very much. Their staff are friendly and helpful with all of my needs. I hope one day to be able to reciprocate Rachel and John's generosity and have them visit Zanzibar. I have to say that I absolutely love being an ex-pat and living abroad.

Buddas and friends in Ubud Bali



These are the lower gardens and of course there are Buddhas and other statues around the grounds. Local women come by twice a day in traditional dress to leave offerings – Bali is predominantly Hindu and this is done all over the island. There are small offerings of flowers and rice in bamboo leaves left on the sidewalk in front of stores and homes. Just as I love that in Zanzibar there is the call to prayers 5 times a day I appreciate that the Balinese love their religion and practice it with fervency. On the right is my dear friend John Elbert (facing us on the left). He is an American living in Bangkok and I stayed in a friend's flat in his building and he took great care of me after my surgery. He came to Bali with me as my "skycap" to make sure that I didn't carry anything heavy. He stayed with me at the villa for two nights to make sure I was settled then went down to Semnyak where he usually stays in Bali. With him is Gil, an American who has lived in Bali for more than 15 years and Fred Poisson (check out his website www.fredpoisson.com) an American painter who is visiting. I am very fortunate to have friends no matter when I travel.

Market and meetings in Ubud Bali



Ubud is a town in the mountains, not by a beach. On the left is a view of the large tourist market where they sell sarongs, jewelry, dresses (I bought some of those), Buddha carvings and such. In the center I was walking down the street and there was this man carving a Buddha out of bricks at the entrance to a small street. He would later do another one on the other side. On the right is the table where the morning AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) meeting is held – they also have them at night downstairs in a local restaurant. There is a wonderful community of people who have been in Bali for a long time clean and sober. I found out that there is also a local rehab and I'm sorry that I didn't get time to visit it. I'm told that the local Balinese are beginning to come to meetings but it's going to take time. It would be

wonderful if somehow we can share the success stories in Zanzibar and inspire the Balinese to maybe start their own meetings and sober houses. One day at time more will be revealed.

Balinese Healing



Ubud and all of Bali is a place of healing. It is called the Island of the Gods and I believe that there is a very special energy here. I did go to an energy healer who told me that my 5th (throat chakra) is very busy which causes some of my vertigo. (I do talk a lot as anyone I know can attest). Many people come to Bali to “find themselves” as was portrayed in Eat Pray Love. Do you know you can go to the same healer that Julia Roberts went to?? He has become a tourist attraction which I think is a bit sad. My friend Susan took me to a local healer who poked at my toes with a wooden type dowel and gave me some medicine for to help me heal quicker from surgery. I don’t understand all of the details about the healing or the culture here but I have noticed that the Balinese seem pretty happy with their lives.

This is the first time in my life that I have had this much time alone without any obligations. I could take time to meditate without worrying about what I had to do next or who was going to come and visit. I could swim, sun, read and just be. I have a friend in Zanzibar who told me it’s good to get away and “wash my brain” and that is true. I don’t feel like this was a “vacation” away from my life where I unwind and re-energize myself. What I have learned is that I don’t have to go away to be content – that is definitely an inside job. I can walk slowly and keep on appreciating the beauty around me and take pleasure in my days. I can do that even if I’m busy with many other things – it’s my choice as to how happy I want to be today. I am eternally grateful to Rachel for giving me this gift of time unfettered by any of my usual responsibilities.

I will return to Bangkok tomorrow to see my doctor for my last checkup and then go home to Zanzibar which I’m looking forward to. I have met many lovely people and I have learned of some wonderful future opportunities for Participate Now!! I have realized that I live my work and I am most content with my life – I don’t want to be anyone but Kathryn today.

I will be visiting the East Coast, Boston, Connecticut and New York in April/May and look forward to seeing many of you.

Relax and Enjoy
Kathryn