

May 2007

My Dear Sweet Ladies,

Mark said that if I just kept doing the next right thing, the year would go fast. I'm not sure that I always did the next right thing every time, but it actually has gone fast....but only in looking back :-). We now have our flights home for summer and are trying not to feel panicky about finishing up here for now.

This past month, we have been watching, outside our window, an operation that is both fascinating, and....odd (from an ecological standpoint). There is a huge specialized boat that dredges sand up and sends it by long pipe (lots of guys hook up these huge pipes) to right offshore. This is their way of, well, making more land. We're not sure what they are making more land *for* yet, but I'll get back to you on that. The taxi driver says it's going to be a mosque because they haven't got enough mosques for this section of road yet (there are about 2 every block), another person thinks it will be beach, another says they're just fancying up the cornice and will add curves and trees to the walkway. So far it's just a huge area of sand they are leveling out with backhoes and skidsteers. Stay tuned.

It's beginning to get too hot to walk too far, but we still walk when we can since it often takes just as long to park. There is some shopping in walking distance, but mostly the dentist (with Starbucks on the way there), and small grocery, and some parks. One of the children (whom I shall not name) has an affinity for shoe shopping. Now in fairness, he/she doesn't always *buy* some, but just likes to look. And there are some fun shoes to look at. Last time we were at the K.M.Traders, we found Cinderella's plexiglass slippers, the quintessential Persian shoes replete with curved up toes and jewels, and some dangerously high spaghetti strap sandals. I'm pretty sure they're serious about this.

As you all have probably guessed by now, whether something seems logical or not, is often all in how you look at it. I have focused a bit (in these letters anyway) on things that don't seem logical to me at first glance. This last letter for the summer, I believe I could focus on things *I* or we do, that would, at first glance, not seem logical to other people. Just to give equal time.

~ The doors in the buildings here, often have 2, to go through (to keep air-conditioned air in better). For some reason they don't always both open the same way. For example, the one downstairs (a frequently used one by me I might add) first says push, the next one

says pull. Now these are in English, and are clearly marked, but I will do the opposite of what it says almost everytime, while one of the older children (who notice these things) will mutter quietly to me the word written on the door. Seems to *me* this method works against the principle of momentum. I guess I can't handle the door thing.

~ There is a practice here (someone just told me the Arabic word for it but it didn't stick), that says a person will say what they do not mean, in order to be the polite one or to save face (which are often one and the same...). In looking back on the year, even though I was vaguely aware of this tendency, I must confess to not always catching on to what someone really meant. I think I've overstayed, had coffee when they really wanted me to leave, and borrowed toys (at their insistence) when they really didn't want to loan them. Maybe I'm not as good at reading non-verbal cues as I thought I was.

~ It also took me awhile this year, to catch on to the fact that Arab people, even from other countries, don't just drop in – even when you tell them to (perhaps...an inverse of above item). So it isn't enough to say "yes, please come every week this time", or "you are always welcome here, whenever you can. Just come.". And I have discovered that it isn't even that they don't want to – but I need to call to invite them, each time. Ok. I can do this.

~ And I notice that this list is erm...shorter than the usual ...list. :-0

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Some things we still are getting used to here:

- *Landing on cement or marble rather than on grass or wood or carpet. Well I don't mean that we are getting better at it, just that we expect something more along the lines of what happens with cement or marble now. Evidently, Jon broke a bone in his wrist 3 months ago (no, not skateboarding :-), but we didn't realize it. Something seemed wrong, but well, not that wrong. Anyway, he has to have surgery tomorrow morning (your Friday evening) to remove a cysts that has grown (in an effort to restore itself), and to repair the break. Please pray for Jon, he has been trying to keep busy refinishing the balcony furniture to keep his nervous mind off it.
- *knowing any dish is gone, the minute it leaves our hand. The floor is so hard, there is no hope for it.
- *Skateboard tricks in the house
- *The noise of children playing soccer in the hall out the front door (we leave the door open to monitor)
- *ingredient differences
- *French fries and hamburger buns, rather than mashed potatoes and gravy, and bisquits, coming with your Kentucky Fried Chicken.

*navigating the car through very narrow one way lanes with cars parked on both sides.

*having to park in a way that *we* would call:"illegally", because there just isn't enough parking.

*zero tolerance (with photo taken) for going through light on a yellow.

And last but not least, believe it or don't, we still struggle with the "personal space issue". As I believe I've mentioned, we in the U.S. have some of the largest needs for space between us and the next person. What I didn't realize was that personal space also has to do with how people look at you. The folks here (usually those from other Arab countries), not only stand too close, but they stare. We're getting somewhat used to ignoring it. After some particularly close calls, I am so happy to come into my house, shut the door, look out the window at the seemingly endless ocean, and sit down on the couch where the 2 littlest fight for my lap and the next few up fight for who gets to sit next to me. Ah well, maybe it depends upon who it is eh?

We are headed home "on holiday", and to take care of the farm for a bit. I'll resume this correspondence upon my return (although anyone that would write me would be most welcome to, and they would also probably get a reply :-)) This has been an unbelievable help – thank you so much for either reading, or not telling me you hit delete. Have a wonderful summer (I love summer).

With much love and fond affection,
Pam.

"From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed:
lead me to the rock that is higher than I." Psalm 61:2



