

My Dear Sweet Ladies,

Walking through the dusty back streets of Abu Dhabi, where only those who know where they are going, go - you can get to your destination much quicker. No tourist would even know about those routes, let alone be willing to go back there and try navigating when you can't see past the tall buildings. I made my way to the shop owned by a very nice Palestinian lady, who says home is Lebanon since she was born there, and her relatives live there. She sells many things, but what I always look for here, are her embroidered and cross stitched items. She was showing me a few pillow covers and wall hangings in a pile, and one at the bottom with a Bible verse on it caught my eye so I asked her about it. She explained that "sometimes people want to buy those". I happen to know that it is not legal to sell things with Bible verses on them here, and if a Muslim sees those (and one had just left her shop) and wants to make an issue, she would have many things confiscated. Yet this woman is Muslim not Christian. She takes the risk for the money. And I'm left wondering why I don't always dare to take risks for other's souls - a far more valuable thing...

The shore in front of our former building still has mounds of sand with large skid steers and bulldozers and rollers, moving, flattening and shaping the sand. Evidently creating a natural beach is a difficult and lengthy process for mortals.

We saw large numbers of Gazelles one day through the desert. We have only seen these timid fast moving creatures one other time. I wish I had a lot of nice pictures but they move fast, and oddly, I was not in a pictorial mood that day.

"A useful hobby, hard work, a will to see good, and nice smells. These things can keep one afloat."

I finally got to trimming the basil trees. They were taller than me but once I took the flowers off and made an attempt at shaping them, they about look me in the eye. The morning glory that I discovered as a tiny volunteer leaf on the ground last November is spreading all over the wall and ground. I need to get more bamboo sticks to tie it up to. The Magnolia tree still has no flowers, but it now has new green leaves and shoots all over itself. It's amazing how near to destruction a thing can get and still recover.

One of my large houseplants has recovered without me. I struggled with this lovely plant from the start. It sort of liked it here in the house, and truly it didn't know anything else (it sprouted in captivity). But it just couldn't get enough sun, though I even got up early to note the sunlight patterns through the high window to put it directly in the best path for it. All loving attentions aside, it did not thrive. When Mark suggested that we take it out and just plant it in the garden I was aghast. It seemed like abandonment. And yet I was ready to try it since I seemed helpless to keep it alive as things were. So we got it outside, took it out of its nice clay pot and planted it in the garden where it could get mostly sun. There are new leaves unfurling all over the place and it looks better than it ever did while inside the house. I'm sort of sad that it likes it out there better than in here, in a selfish way.

I spent most of March on bed rest for severe back pain (of unknown origin), on medication, and/or sick. And I wasn't even wanting to mention it, except that it occurred to me that I would pray for any of you should you be having similar difficulties and I knew about it. The back pain is still a mystery and I walk very carefully these days, but it's better than not walking at all. I hope to find out what is the matter when I get home. All of this has made me rather dull and stupid feeling, with writers block. And that *combination* is just as well I guess.

As we finish another stage of our language lessons, we have acquired a new Arabic teacher. She is from Iraq and has PhD in Arabic so she is what I would call a language "purist". :-). She has an odd habit of...oath taking in Arabic (evidently not realizing we know what she is saying), whenever we inadvertently use an Egyptian form, or a Farsi (Iranian) word. Local dialect here does use those things in everyday speech, but her mission in life is to keep the classical Arabic alive. We humor her best we can. She is a very sweet lady and we have tea wherever we meet (and...abayas and shayalas aside, she has the most magnificent patterns on hers – no plain black for her).

The "Zone" report:

- Stop me if you've heard this one – They are digging up the road again. (what happens when there is no actual city planner).

-Abu Dhabi has instituted a 200 Dirham fine for jaywalking, to reduce accidents. Since this is such a common crime and one that I myself have committed often since it is safer than crossing at a corner light, the authorities (in a sort of if you can't beat 'em, join 'em move) have had quite a few more crosswalks painted on the roads at logical places to jaywalk. You still are crossing at very much your own risk, just as before.

- not sure where to put this tidbit so I chose here. The younger children have discovered that by digging up road dirt and adding water, and baking it in the sun for a day, they get cement bricks. So that is their current occupation. I think this is a result of all the building materials that get dropped or overflow into the road but I would expect if that were the case, then these roads would have been paved after the January rains.

As I mentioned in the last issue, there are often neighbor children (and sometimes their nannies) in the house to play or to stay to dinner. One in particular and his little brother, have attached themselves rather firmly. They are very good boys (the younger, *only* by virtue of the older watching him, in addition to the fact that the younger – age 4 loves Kim and follows her around). But the younger one, named Mohammed (I know, what were the odds :-)) really reminds me of a character in the TinTin book "Land of the Black Gold" – little Abdullah. I have to remind myself this isn't his name.

We continue to appreciate the sermons from home, emails with (or without) pictures, and your prayers. We'll be home for a brief 4 weeks on May 23rd so we'll try to catch up with many of you then. Happy 50th Anniversary Mom and Dad! Thanks for such a great example.

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." Psalms 61:2

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