

My Dear Sweet Ladies,

I never thought I would park illegally until we were in Abu Dhabi for a few months and there was clearly no choice. Even then one often parks many blocks away from your intended destination. On most side streets and parking lots, there are cars parked on both sides and then on the center line. This makes it difficult to pass at times and I have had literally 1 or 2 inches leeway on either side of our vehicle (with heads hanging out to watch, gauge, and warn). It also makes it hard to get out of a space if someone parks behind you in the center. There are cars parked around the curve of roads, cars parked behind others cars parked, and sometimes one has to park a larger vehicle into a spot the size for a compact (our vehicle is an 8 passenger 4wd. Gets us out of sand better.). That's when I let everyone out and then climb out the back. Abu Dhabi has gotten even more crowded and busy since we left. They just instituted their first form of mass transportation (remember, this country bypassed the train era and went from camels to Mercedes') in the form of a city bus system. I think it's a great idea and I hope it works for them. I still take the back roads to that city every month for the orthodontist, and it's a fascinating trip, usually characterized by camels in or near the road, donkeys, goats or sheep herds, and massive sand dunes in various colors depending upon where you are in the country. Each emirate seems to have a corresponding color to their sand. Though I don't think that fact shows up on the geographical map *or* the political one.

Logic – Free Zone report:

You can buy a prestigious license plate here, for lots of extra money. At a recent auction for these plates in Fujairah, the ones still left were being sold and the nominal fees (where auctioning begins) were listed. The lower the number, the higher the cost (and the higher the prestige). Just so you get the idea, #1 would be the most costly license plate and few single digit numbers were left. It's a wonder too, since the nominal cost for these single digit plates began at AED.600,000 (u.s.\$ 163,376.67). Then there were a few double or "meaningful" triple digit numbers left (such as 007), starting at AED.100,000 (u.s.\$27,229.44). Ordinary triple digit or more were going for a mere AED.50,000 (u.s.\$13,614.72) to AED. 20,000 (u.s.\$5,445.89). I'll allow this to stand without further comment.

There have been a few holidays in December already. National Day is like our United States 4th of July (sort of). There are more fireworks and purposeful destruction of vehicles here, but 37 years ago this country became a country. Before that it was a collection of Trucial States under the protectorate of Great Britain. Go look at an old map to see. You'll also see the Soviet Union in place of the current "Russia", and perhaps the old "Belgian Congo", or perhaps Zaire, in place of the current "Democratic republic of Congo". This world undergoes many changes and many of them do not affect

the everyday lives of us in America too much. Let's not forget how very much these changes can affect those people in the areas of political change.

Eid. This is another religious holiday that has a longer name but it escapes me just now. After observing the neighbors butchering a sheep in their backyard, I wonder if I would have been just like Cain. Sure I've seen and even helped with butchering of animals. But for food only. This is a kind of sacrifice here, then they eat it. I think it's an inexact religious thing, or at least practiced in a seemingly inexact way (to us). But how sad they don't acknowledge the one true final sacrifice that Jesus Himself was. And I wonder if this feels like you're really "doing something" for God. I haven't yet decided what to do with the small bag of mutton that someone gave us this morning at the front gate, but I have some idea.

My friend from Abu Dhabi has been struggling with an old (erroneous) concept of – following the law, makes you a better person/Christian. She does read her Arab/English bible and is becoming more and more grounded in what her role is as a New testament believer so this helped in the discussion. Perhaps the most critical thing I wanted to address and be sure she was clear on, is that the Quran is NOT a true book. It's not the Word of God. This was acknowledged, but it is a struggle to give up something you searched for God in, your whole life.

The boys have started hiking back into the black mountains to go camping. I wasn't sure how they'd feel about it when they got back (if they got back) but they had a wonderful time, and in a true spirit of adventure (I don't know how to teach this), their hardships taught them and they rose up to meet the challenges. They do plan to bring visitors on this trek so come mentally prepared :-).

And that is a little bit of news from this side of the world, from my point of view. Have a very Merry Christmas. God really did come to earth in a small package to save us from our sinful state didn't He.

“Sinners wrung with true repentance,
Doomed for guilt to endless pains:
Justice now revokes the sentence,
Mercy calls you, break your chains.”
(James Montgomery)

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)

<http://mjohnsonfamily.com/GulfNews/>

Parking is nuts in Abu Dhabi



Robyn and Kim in an Afghani Burka. Smile girls! :-D



Sunrise over the Indian Ocean (I know. “again”. How can I resist another sunrise)



sunset from our rooftop (see above parenthetical remark. Substitute “sunset”)



sunset over Khalifa city...



What happens when a guy falls asleep in a chair, around all these girls:



Jon and Jeremiah. Camping trip into the black mountains



Jacob, Jon and Stephen on National Day



Bushra and Pam, fabric shopping



Camel Crossing:



Our recent good activity: caterpillar (from the xenoculture out back), to chrysalis, to butterfly:





(sorry^ a little fuzzy due to enlargement, cropping, other nonsense I didn't need to do)



a whole new life. I love this.