

My Dear Sweet Ladies,

“If nobody spoke unless he had something to say,
the human race would very soon lose the use of speech.”

- (W. Somerset Maugham)

With that sentiment, I begin February’s letter. Perhaps I have been taking life somewhat for granted because it isn’t as though we haven’t done some interesting things. I guess it’s the telling of it that makes it seem less so. Sort of like when a beautiful photo opportunity presents itself, but all you really want to do is enjoy the view.

“You can't wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club.”

- (Jack London)

We went to the camel races recently. Not the big track in Dubai, but one way out in the desert. It was more of a heritage day, where they had real people riding them instead of the robots on the back of the ones in Dubai. These were men who raced camels since they were young boys and some of these men were now 60 and 70 years old. They had an ambulance there, which makes sense I guess. But in each race at least one person fell off their camel, which seems like a high rate of injury to me.

There was a beauty contest there as well, for camels thankfully. Apparently there are a series of...er...characteristics that make for a beautiful camel (their descriptor not mine). Check out the enclosed photo and see what *you* think about the beauty of a camel.

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The "Zone" report:

- There are cameras on the roads to take a picture of your car (and license plate) if you are going above a certain speed. On most roads in this town, there are no signs to indicate what speed you are allowed. You have to find out from the municipality what each road is.
- This is how it works for building a house here: There is a foreman. He has all the skills. Those who work under him are paid something like 200.00 (in U.S. dollars) a month. They don't have any skills but are told what to do by the foreman. I suppose by the end of the house they must know something. The one who inspects the finished building (in this town) is from the municipality and probably his parents lived in a tent somewhere in this desert.
- I can walk into a pharmacy and get whatever prescription drug I want with only a few exceptions, but I can't buy poppy seeds for cooking. They are illegal here.
- You have to register your car each year. The man who approves the car for re-licensing is allowed to have a bad enough day to refuse to it unless you do something drastically silly (like peel all the sun protection off your windows). But if you know someone related to royalty, they will have their driver take the car in for you and bypass all that silliness. (not sure which part falls under the logic-free designation)

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The Hajar mountain chain has a few high mountains in it, but the ones around Fujairah are not so high you need ropes, etc... A good walking stick will help in some places though. The thing about these mountains is they all look the same - row after row of rocks, many loose, and scattered poky acacia trees. And don't touch any of the few plants you happen to come across – they all have thorns. In fact everything in those mountains is dry and sharp. Except for the donkey :-).

The oldest son of the Sheik of Fujairah (which makes him the Crown Prince) is getting married next week. They're putting the finishing touches on the road and the roundabouts they just redid, planting flowers, metal archways over the road, other sculptures. Across from the palace there is a large lot that is usually empty. It is now filled with huge tents for guests to eat in. The other road has temporary wooden walls with murals of the royal family on it. That is to cover up the slums. Since one of the tenets of Islam is to give to the poor, one night when driving past, all the ground area in front of the tents was filled with poor people, eating, courtesy of the soon to be groom.

The red tide is officially gone. That, along with a typhoon 2 summers ago, and a few oil spills (due to non-enforcement) have worked together to nearly eliminate the coral reef we snorkel on. The difference I have observed between just 2 1/2 years ago and now is incredible, and very sad.

I can't seem to get away from the thought that there are a few of you who receive this letter that are undergoing cancer treatments. Please know that you are in my prayers often.

Upon reading the last 2 years of February Gulf News', it seems evident that I have a biologically ingrained propensity to think and write very sluggishly at this time of year, brought on by long dark cold winters. It is encouraging to me that I still have this February Writing Block Trait even here where it's sunni and warm.

Have a good rest of February everyone! The winter is almost over (and in a rare winter, you get a chance to ride your bike at the end). Happy Birthday Mom! This year I think I can manage a non-broken cherry pie since you and Dad are here with us :-).

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 " (Psa 61:2)

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A real beauty



A day at the races (camel races)





Mountain climbing expedition



Soft feral donkey under very sharp poky acacia tree



I had an Indian Roller come to my window for breakfast the other day. No, I don't know why it's named that. But it's even more colorful when it flies. (he left my window to eat it on this basketball hoop back)



Red-wattled Plover (see above for name reason) a very timid bird.

