

My Dear Sweet Ladies,

I usually prefer to begin a letter when I'm feeling enthusiastic and optimistic, for my sake and yours but I am afraid it won't ever get written if I do that this time. We're doing fine – no worries. But there are many pressures and stresses that we didn't have last year and they are wearing on us. So I commence the letter anyway, hoping that you will stop and pray for us just now.

It's funny how very different each year here has been from the last. People come and go, businesses close, even where dry land is can change. So far we've been able to look at each new year as a challenging adventure, and I suppose that is, in reality, what this one is too. Thankfully many of the opportunities set in motion from previous years are still running. We'll keep trying to see it rightly.

“When we cannot see our way
let us trust and still obey
He who bids us forward go
cannot fail the way to show”
(Thomas Kelly)

It's been nice to have our road paved this year. We still have to go across a dirt/sand field to get into the neighborhood but it's nice. The bright pink Bougainvillea drops its colored leaves out onto the pavement and looks prettier than a sidewalk would. It's much nicer for the boys to ride their bikes on and I don't get nearly as much sand and dirt in the house now. The garden is full of flowers and plants so inside the walls - its a beautiful place. I'm not meaning to say it isn't outside the walls, but I'm feeling somewhat borderline agoraphobic so it is inside the walls that interests me most today. The Magnolia and the Neem trees are huge, as is one of the Palm trees. The Morning Glories are climbing all over everything that stands still long enough and we've even gotten a few watermelons from the watermelon vines.

The Zone Report:

- It is difficult to gauge economic trends where there is not true freedom of speech. You would read that everything is quickly on an upswing (and you previously would have read that there wasn't a downswing here, so it begs the question of what would it be swinging from). But even just a cursory look would tell you that there are many more empty spots where shops or other businesses once were.
- The phone company tries to install spyware on users' blackberries (without users' permission). Never mind that it has caused a lot of technical problems for users, rendering these phones nearly useless at times. The reason (they do this) is: "it isn't illegal here"
- It is illegal, however, for a Schwarma shop to sell Schwarma (local hot sandwich) before 5:30 pm.

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The cake was a work of art. Intricate real chocolate roses and leaves over a lattice pattern over smooth base. I should have taken a picture but I wanted to keep the magic of dinner flowing. We had been given Chinese noodles and chicken and fried rice along with this cake for our dinner. The person who made it is a master cake decorator. We have been given beautiful cakes here before (it is a common gift) but they always fall short of their looks in the taste and texture department. This one was better than some, but still – not anywhere near as good as a plain American chocolate cake. The inner layers of frosting were between some sort of almost soggy cake. But I rather think it was a purposeful soggy since it had a peculiar flavor to it I can't quite put my finger on. I started out thinking about this cake in a metaphorical sense, but now that I'm at the punch line I can't bring myself to do it. It truly was beautiful beyond belief. I was not the only one that overlooked the indiscretions of the interior because of the beauty of the exterior...

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Time for another "British Funny": We have recently discovered that the British have a unique way of referring to (what we call) 2 door and 4 door vehicles. They call them "3 door" and "5 door" vehicles. Apparently they include the *boot, but not the *bonnet. (*trunk and *hood respectively) And here is a weight loss tip if you need one – In the UAE, you weigh yourself in Kilograms. There are 2.2 pounds to 1 Kg. This means a much lower number (yess!). But if you are British, you weigh yourself in *stones*. Talk about a fast reduction in numbers! It takes 14 American pounds to equal 1 Stone. This seems like a much nicer way to start the day to me. ☺

That's the news through my eyes, from this end of the earth.

Much Love and Fond Affection,

~Pam.

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"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

The former houseplant that now lives out in the garden. It's doing much better out there



Neighbor chickens



Mark and Kim's homemade Bagel experiments (very hard to find bagels here)



my fiftieth birthday surprise at an Owatanna park last summer in July



We now have our own "Give Way", and speed limit signs (our house on left background)



a favorite shopping area (for fabric)

