

My Dear Sweet Ladies,

We had the first real rain of the season yesterday. The pavement, flowers, leaves, and laundry were still wet this morning. But the birds were singing happy songs through my open window. I was going to search for my camera to get a picture of Mr. and Mrs. Green Parrot, but I chose to sit there watching them instead (a common theme lately). It smells almost as nice as the rain in Minnesota, but without that wormish smell that is so familiar.

Tonight a few of the children and I will be singing Christmas carols at the Siji (fancy hotel downtown). The town was all invited and we pass out a sheet of paper with the words of the carols so they can sing along for most of them. This sounds interesting to be able to do in the middle east perhaps, but for people who don't believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the great Mediator between God and man, this western holiday of Christmas appears to them to be just another secular gift giving time. It's hard to bridge that gap between beliefs while maintaining the Truth.

It was a lovely, busy, exciting week that my sister and her husband and 9 of their children visited. It was during the Islamic holiday of "Eid" that they were here so that meant Mark was off work the whole time. ...but that also meant so was everyone else. We managed to try to find lonely places here and there, or get rolling early in the morning so things weren't so crowded. But since by evening everything got crowded (even the desert), we all got to experience the very busiest of life here. It was a great week just being with them!

The Logic-Free Zone report:

~You may already be aware that Wasabi paste and mustard come in tubes. But now you can get Vegemite in a tube. This is for camping purposes. My Australian friend says it's great (what's not to like about black yeast paste), but my British friend is holding out for Marmite in a tube. (Evidently, ne're the twain shall meet on vegemite and marmite.)

~Parking here can be hazardous and entrapping, but parking during a holiday may mean you'll not get out until everyone else does. The people here think nothing of 3 row parking and if you tell them you will be blocked in – they look at you oddly and ask if you are wanting to leave "right now".

~as the neighborhood people get their "sidewalks" made, the rubble and large rocks dug up in the process keep getting moved down the road to the one who still has dirt at their edge. We are getting quite a large collection of these now. One particularly large and lovely grouping is making it difficult to get into the driveway.

~some roads in downtown Al Ain (oasis city that borders Oman), are made from a cobblestone that is very slippery when not even wet.

Perhaps you'll recall a previous rant regarding sushi (I shan't capitalize it). We've just come across a list of "etiquette" that one must follow when eating this. As if raw fish wrapped in seaweed strips rolled in raw fish EGGS aren't enough to send me screaming, now I can't eat (theoretically) the pickled ginger *with* it, but in between, to cleanse my palate. I'm thinking if I ever eat something that will require that I cleanse my palate – I've made an initial etiquette mistake right there.

Thank you to all who sent us letters last month. It makes a big difference in how we're able to cope with things here when we hear from you. Yes we do live by faith – faith that you're thinking of us, faith in God, faith that He has you all praying for us, etc... But it's so fun to get mail 😊 (my complete understanding to those who simply can't but want to). And while yes, seeing camels, donkeys, goats in the road, geckos, sand dunes, the Indian Ocean, sea turtles, and palm trees has become almost daily occurrences (one definition of "commonplace"), and we aren't exactly tired of them. But we definitely look forward to the more commonplace - pine trees, prairie grass, garden variety flowers, an occasional roaming snapping turtle and cows. It's amazing how much can accumulate in a few years though so we've started sorting through and eliminating things.

We will be travelling to Abu Dhabi this week to meet up with some friends and bring them back here to stay for a few days. They are planning to move to Canada soon but aren't sure exactly when (immigration), but they are thinking this month they'll be leaving. They are ones I have talked about before and are originally from Iraq. Please pray for them as they make decisions. This is no easy thing for them.

And that's the news from my end of the earth. Thanks so much for joining me again.

A very Merry and Wonderful Christmas to all of you and your families.

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)

Photos below:

Flowers (Vinca) after the rain (photo courtesy of Lilly).



house gecko (a rather nervous one) -



they go wherever they want to go –



race camel -



stopping for petrol (a neighborhood station) -



two whole levels of shopping -



cousins on colorful playground -



petting a young camel (old enough to spit, hence the "muzzle")



Isaiah and Stephen – camel riding



Last bit of desert sun –



Serendipity (both coffee shops at Dubai Mall can be seen in one photo frame from my secret spot on the floor) -



Evening Dubai skyline (Burj Dubai left of center)-

