

## African Adventure

by Irma Kackert

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March 4, 2003 – Here is a copy of a letter I wrote, while in Saudi Arabia on May 9, 1984

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Dear Family and Friends: It's been a very long time, since I have written a long letter, and a few of you have written to me, saying "what has happening, why are you not writing us, about your experiences over there?" First, it has become difficult to have a useful typewriter, the one I use in our department, has been out of commission several times. There was a big change in electric power here in Taif; they put in new generators, were supposed to change from 60 cycle to 50. Well, this happened, our motors were burning out, the typewriter kept breaking down. Eventually, here at Rehab, it was found that it was necessary to change back to 60 cycle again, so things would function. For instance, the jet motors on the Hubbard tanks, where I immerse patients with pressure sores, got too hot and would burn out, if we kept using them, etc, etc. Elevators in our residence buildings did not function, from mid January, to about 3 weeks ago – and I live on the 4th floor! Second, there was a ban put out; on use of the copy machine, for personal use. This is how I make the letters to send out; and now I have to "bootleg" them. We do not have a handy "Thrifty Drug Store" around the corner, with a machine available, as in the states. Anyway, here is another letter from Irma.

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In January I had my first post-leave on this contract; we get 2 weeks paid vacation, every 4 months, and 30 days paid at the end of one year. I chose to go to Kenya, Africa, since I had not yet visited there. I had always put it low on my list of priorities, as where to travel, thought it would be hot, dusty, and maybe not too interesting. On the contrary, it was lovely, the country is green, many flowers seen, green bushes, rivers, waterfalls, mountains, etc. The people are very keen on education, there were schools all over, even way out in the remote areas I saw elementary schools, and the children were in uniforms. These were the government, or public schools. The race of people have fairly light skin, for the black race, and delicate features, similar to the white race. They speak English, for it is the second language, and taught in schools, and I found them friendly, and helpful always. The country next to them, Uganda, has the race of people with the large lips, and very dark skin. They were having uprisings there, as are many other African nations.

I first flew to Nairobi, and then on to Mombasa, which is a small city way down at the southern end of Kenya, and on the Indian Ocean. It has beautiful beaches, and many resort hotels there. The swaying palm trees, lovely flowers, white sand, warm ocean, all made for a few delightful days there. I stayed at the White Sands Beach hotel. I also took a day, and rode the small bus into Mombasa proper, to see this old town. It had many lovely, large white buildings, reminiscent of the English colonial days (a free country now) also poorer homes, living is still going on as it did many years ago. It was all very interesting. People are poor, for there is not enough employment for all -- many men and women have small stands in the city, where they sell carved items, baskets, other woven articles. They were anxious to trade items from tourists, and wanted the backpack bag I had on or t-shirts from

other countries, sandals, shoes, etc. I have a peaked cap, on which I have sewed patches from many of the countries I have visited, and everyone wanted to trade something for it. Needless to say, I did not respond to that. However, I did trade a couple of blouses, a billfold and pair of socks, for 2 bright lengths of cloth they wrap around themselves, for clothing. Men and women wear the same. The women then wrap another over it, and have their baby or small child in it, either on their back or at their abdomen in case they are carrying a huge bunch of sticks, or straw, on their back.

After this experience, I went back to Nairobi, taking a bus, so I could observe the people at close range, and see the entire countryside. Passed close to Mt. Kilimanjaro, (I also saw it from the air) many of the fabulous baobab trees, huge ant hills, higher than a man, local villages, etc. In Nairobi I met a nurse from Al Hada hospital, with whom I arranged to go on safari with. We chose first to go to Masa Mara, the huge range where animals of all kinds live. This is protected by the government, no killing of animals is allowed – if a guard goes with you on safari, he carries a gun in case an animal charges, but it has only tranquilizers in it. An elephant charged at our car once, but the driver just revved up the motor loudly, and the animal stopped, the guard did not have to use the gun. You go out in a small bus, in which the top lifts up, so one can stand up and aim the camera out, or just to look at the animals. No one is allowed to get out of the cars. The driver will start out, looking for animals, if he sees something, he tries to get very close, then stops so all can view the scene. The lions are quite lazy, will stay in their spot and gaze back at the car – only when they are hungry do they roam or travel fast– or if they are attacked. We came upon one at a kill of a large water buffalo, he was eating leisurely. It was so interesting, hundreds of scavengers, vultures, buzzards, jackals, and hyenas sat around in a large circle, safely distant from the lion, patiently waiting until he had his fill– as he walked away, they pounced upon the carcass, then he turned to come back, and they had to flee hurriedly. We stayed at this spot over an hour, watching as the lion called another pair of males to eat – 7 females came out of a bushy area and slowly walked toward the dead buffalo, but the male growled and would not let them eat. They all sat patiently around a distance away, waiting their turn. I said it was like in Saudi Arabia, ladies eat their meal after the men have finished!

In this area we also visited the village of the Masai tribe, a very interesting people, who live on milk and blood, mixed. They do not grow anything in the ground, nor eat vegetables, just a little meat sometimes. They herd huge bunches of cattle along the Rift Valley, we saw them very often. The men still hunt lions, and kill them with only spears, though this is illegal. I bought a lion's tooth, from one of the women who approached our car, at the side of the road. I also took her picture, for which she wanted 10 shillings, and I gladly gave it to her.

The second safari took us to Treetops, and elevated structure out in the “bush” where a water hole is lighted brightly at night, and animals come to lick salt, and drink the water. We saw many kinds there, at one time I counted 32 elephants on the ground below – they trumpeted, roared, stomped around, then many went off into the dark forest, and we could hear the trees crashing, great trumpeting and commotion. They eat the tender area just under the bark, do a lot of damage this way, but this is their natural habitat, and food. The babies walk underneath their mothers most of the time, it was so cute. We also saw a rhinoceros come and drink, they do not appear all the time, so I felt lucky. Part of this

particular safari was to take us for 3 days to Mt. Kenya Safari Club, the luxurious resort, very close to Mt. Kenya, and we had booked and paid for it – the day before we were to go, the agency said that it was closed to tourists at that time, because the Board of Directors was having their annual meeting, and it was closed to the public. Was sorry to miss it – however, we drove all around in this area, visiting lakes, lovely forested areas, coffee plantations, saw thousands and thousands of flamingos standing in the water's edge of a lake – they eat the algae and keep the balance of nature, the water is clean. There were baboons all over, giraffes wander around, like the camels here in Saudi, zebras rove in huge herds, topi stand and pose, on the top of a little knoll, gazelles of many kinds leap across the road in front of you, we even saw a hippo out of the water once, eating grass – however before we could get close, for a picture, he ran (fast) back into the river. I did not know before, that they are vegetarian. In fact, I learned a lot on this trip.

I must mention the beautiful birds of all shapes and sizes, and coloration. They are just beautiful! There are so many of them, flying in front of you, sitting in trees, and eating in the grasses. Also saw several kinds of unusual bird nests. It was the crested crane, I guess, that took my eye, so beautiful, with his crown, standing calmly in grass or bush. On the last day, as we were driving out of the Sambosa range, back to Nairobi and trip to Jedda, I suddenly saw a lioness walking in the grass, quite away from the road – no one else had seen it. I called out, the driver stopped, and we watched. She kept walking toward the car, and then we saw 2 tiny cubs following her, not as tall as the grass. They came right next to the car, in the road, mama was slowly eyeing us, but kept going – the babies were too timid to follow in her tracks, and took to the shoulder of the road, tumbling over the tufts there, then going along after her. I did get several pictures of this procession, they were so cute, felt very lucky to see this.

Guess I could fill a few more pages of this interesting trip, but must go on. My time here is spent at my work, I do several kinds of patient treatment; sometimes do the Hubbard tank patients, with the huge bedsores, one-half of each day is spent exercising patients who just need to be stimulated to walk, or need extensive strengthening of extremities, or back, in the pool. I am also now trying to get one of my patients, a boy of 12 who was found hanging with a rope around his neck (probably in play) and has been comatose for months, had to be tube fed with gastro tube directly into stomach. Now he is returning to recognition of people, says a few sounds – I had to try to stimulate him to swallow again. I did succeed, using a bit of hard candy, in my fingers, let him taste this on his tongue, so saliva would start, then keep saying “eblah” (swallow), etc., etc. Today, I was successful in having him take some orange juice, a little milk, water(2 swallows from a thin, plastic cup) and a very soft boiled egg. It is like enticing a baby to take food, but hopefully, he will eat again. His legs are contracted, and spastic, it will take a long, long time of exercise to stimulate them, try to get them extended, try to stand, and hopefully, eventually to walk. The work is very interesting, and I am thankful that I can do it again. I feel well.

I still go out adventuring on weekends, with friends, camping in mountains, or at the beach of the Red Sea. I took the certification test for Scuba Diving (though I have been diving for 2 years) and passed that, so I felt that was an accomplishment. Right now, I am teaching swimming, through the recreation department here, for employees and their children. I am not able to teach Saudi men though, in the outdoor pool where I live, that is forbidden, since

I am a woman. Those are the rules here. In the therapy pool, inside the hospital, I work with men patients, also women and children, each at different hours. It is very interesting work, I really enjoy it.

Will close for now, thank you for all your letters, keep them coming!

Irma Kackert