

Hello friends.

Maybe some of you think life in Africa is glamorous and exciting every day. I'm not sure I would describe it as glamorous, but there certainly are exciting moments. I love the Rubix Cube puzzle. It took me hours and hours (weeks and weeks) to figure out the puzzle, memorizing each of the steps and now I solve it in 3-5 minutes. I love the last twist that puts all the right colors on the right sides. It fills me with a sense of orderliness. But, as soon as I take my eyes off the cube, someone messes it up and I have to start over again. I didn't mind, really. I like the feeling of accomplishment when everything is in order. The Rubix Cube prepared me for life in Africa. It has taken me a long, long time to understand the system and the culture, and just about the time I think I've got it all sorted out, something happens to make me scratch my head. It has taken patience and persistence and a desire to figure out the puzzle. And every once in a while all the colors come together on the same side. For example, when we first arrived there was not oxygen at the hospital. We had empty tanks that the hospital was paying rent on, but no one seemed to know how to get them filled. In Zimbabwe, it wasn't as easy as looking up "medical supplies" in the phone book. The phones were removed years ago and the wire sold for scrap. We had to drive to the city Mutare and ask people on the streets where to buy gas. Then we had to negotiate a very large back rental bill and have our tanks filled. Then, when we returned, we discovered that the regulators were all missing or broken. Another puzzle. Where do I find oxygen regulators? I was finally able to order some regulators and now our patients have oxygen during an asthma attack or a difficult birth.

What does a day look like on the mission? We are usually woken up to the sound of people chatting or singing as they walk past our front window. In the distance, we can hear the sound of the boarding school students starting their day. My eyes automatically go to the nightlight to see if we have electricity, which is an indication of whether we will have water or not. Not to worry, we have plenty of water stored in buckets. I go for a 5K run on a jungle path, past huts and a water hole. I often meet school children walking to school and they join me in my run, in their bare feet. After a bucket bath, I walk a path to work. We don't have a road to our house, just a path, which Don drives on with our truck. I walk past the maternity huts, where the expectant mothers stay while awaiting the birth of their babies. The mothers call out, "Magwanani. Mwaswera sei?" Then they giggle hysterically at my attempts at their language. In my office, I may work on a budget or a grant request, but most of my day is spent trying to solve the puzzles of the hospital or children's home. A child wants money for a field trip, an employee wants a top up or supplies or equipment. I may talk to a patient, through an interpreter, who cannot pay their hospital bill or investigate a case of sexual abuse or financial mishandling. I visit the wards to keep in touch with the nurses and patients. Sometimes I watch a baby being born or comfort a dying patient. Don and I come home for lunch prepared by our housekeeper. The afternoon I visit the children's home and monitor the pig project. We knock off at 4:30. I like to go for a walk after work to enjoy the daylight, which

ends quickly at 6:30. If we don't have electricity, I light candles in the living room, hall, kitchen and bathroom, so I can move about my house without groping in the dark. I realize that using multiple candles is decadent by African standards, but I don't like dark. Perhaps power outages are why they call this the Dark Continent. We cook dinner on our gas stove, also decadent, since our African neighbors cook outside with wood, sometimes in the rain. The evenings are long and quiet. I like to write or surf the web, both of which I can do on battery power. I read by "torch" (flashlight) and sometimes I even take my iPod dock (rechargeable) outside and dance by the moonlight. My neighbors go to bed early but my biological clock is still ticking on North American time, so I don't go to bed until ten or eleven.

The challenges of providing health care in rural Africa are many and often agonizing. The deaths of two babies last weekend has spurred me to action to provide better maternity care at our hospital.

I live for email, which is the electronic version of coffee klatch. It turns out we can receive mail, too, so don't drop me from your Christmas card list. Last year we received our Christmas cards in March, so please mail early!

If anyone is interested in a pen friend from Zimbabwe, please send me your mailing address with a short description of yourself. People here love to write letters.

As always, we are looking for sponsors for the children at the Children's Home and others in the community. We have a new set of twins at the Home whose mother's died of malaria when they were 5 days old. Rumbesai and Nomatter are their names. Child Sponsorship <http://globalministries.org/get-involved/child-sponsorship/>  
God is truly in all corners of Creation.

In Christ,

Maryjane Westra

Mt. Selinda, Zimbabwe