

June 15, 2010

Dear Family and Friends,

Many of you have asked about our recent trip to Africa. I kept a journal every day that details where we went and what we did. It's a bit much for you to plow through, so I am writing a short (maybe!) summary of our experiences. I hope you enjoy it...



After traveling 8000 miles in fifteen hours across the Atlantic and below the equator, we began our adventure in the beautiful city of Cape Town, South Africa. It is a cosmopolitan city with the massive Table Top Mountain sitting in its background. After taking the cable car up, we walked around the trails on the top and enjoyed the 360° view of the city and the Atlantic Ocean. (No, we did not walk the trail down!) We explored the Jewish Museum and even went back for a short visit to Shabbat services. The Men's Choir and separate seating were not my style, but the experience was wonderful. The city was in high pitch anticipating the World Cup games.



We enjoyed a traditional African 16 course dinner with fabulous drumming (including lessons before dinner) and dancing. Dick was chosen to dance with a performer. With all the excellent African wine in him, he danced with abandon!

We visited the wineries just outside the city. Dick loved every taste, and I even took a sip of wine after hearing the manager describe the taste. It's the first wine I've tasted in over 25 years! Another day we explored Cape Point and the Cape of Good Hope, a windy expanse of wilderness where we climbed many steps to see the most southerly

western part of Africa. Winds were 50+mph. Saw kudus, dassies (badgers), ostrich, baboons, African penguins along the way. We lunched at an internet café in Stellenbosch, a delightful town in the wine county.

Our next stop was Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe. The hotel is reminiscent of when the British controlled this country. Queen Victoria even stayed here - elegance plus. Every meal was served outside. The falls were awesome. We rented raincoats so we wouldn't be drenched by the spray. We put our cameras in plastic bags, but they still got wet. The spray often felt more like rain, heavy rain. The falls are twice the width and twice the height of Niagara Falls. There is no place you can stand to see all of them. We were drenched and exhilarated when we returned to the hotel. They even gave us a little heater to dry our shoes! We also visited a school and a traditional village in Victoria Falls. Both were very primitive by our standards. The private school had very small dark rooms, two children to a desk and no room to move around. The teachers and children (in uniforms) were all happy and very well behaved.

One afternoon, we needed cash in US dollars (Zimbabwe only accepts US dollars), so we found an ATM. It denied our request. After our driver helped us to call the USA and talk to a bank representative, we were able to withdraw the money we needed later that afternoon. That was our most stressful day.

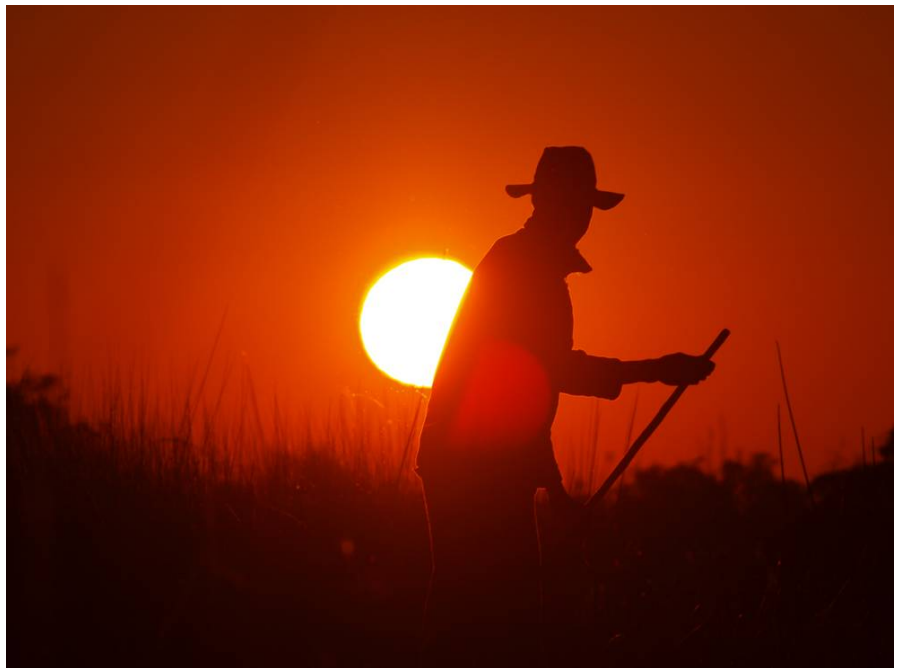
A small charter plane flew us to our first Botswana safari camp, Duma Tau, which means Roaring Lion. Camp is quite an exaggeration - our tent looked nothing like a tent inside. We had running water, an indoor/outdoor shower and a flush toilet. The bed was king size and surrounded by mosquito netting. It's really Winter in Africa now, so mosquitoes were not a problem. On our first game drive with our guide, Moses, we saw impalas, egrets, giraffes and elephants crossing the water, aquatic antelopes, hornbills (aka Zazu in The Lion King), eagles, two hyenas devouring an aquatic antelope (lewche). They have strong jaws and eat the entire carcass including the bones. The next two days we ventured out at 6:30 am and 4:00 pm for long game drives. We saw lions lying in the road (not a road as we know it, but a sandy rutted path through the bush). Altogether, we saw kudu (in the antelope family), iridescent starlings, zebras, baboons, tiny tree squirrels, plovers (birds), more hornbills, and more wildlife than I ever knew existed in one wondrous place. They roam, they fly, they devour, they swim, they sleep, and they copulate. The bush is their home, and we are respectful in their presence.

At the camp we were fed six times a day. The food is prepared and served by delightful staff whose aim was to keep us happy. We were coddled and attended to our every need. We were always accompanied after dark to our tent by staff because animals roam the camp at night. Baboons are plentiful. We were shown huge elephant tracks near our tent, and indeed one afternoon during siesta time, we saw an elephant right outside our tent, munching on his lunch. One day a different elephant even stepped on "our" boardwalk and broke a few planks. We saw his footprints in the mud.

Our next safari camp was Little Vumbura, an island camp. After a small plane ride, a helicopter ride (the air strip was flooded) and a 15 minute ride through the grassy channels of the delta, we arrived at this oasis. The common area

where we met for tea and our meals is totally open to the outside. There's a library and a swimming pool (we're told no one swims in the winter) to enjoy even though the sun felt very hot in the afternoon. Doesn't feel much like winter around mid-day. We fell right into the lunch/siesta/ shower/read mode. Tea at 3:30 and then another three hour game drive before dinner. Altogether, we went on 15 game drives in all three camps. Dinner at 8:00, and then off to bed to be awakened at 5:30 am the next day!

We had a unique experience in a mokoro, the equivalent of a dug out canoe. Our poler guided us through tall grasses and lily pads, always aware that we could come upon a hippo or a crocodile at any moment. At "sundowner time" (afternoon snack) we saw the skeleton of a hippo jaw just lying there for us to explore. Such big teeth he had!



The third camp was Chitabe Lediba, a small camp on the southern edge of the delta, a bit more dry than the other two camps. More game drives, more gorgeous accommodations, more interesting people to talk with. We met people from all over the world at the camps - Boston, Italy, the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Washington, DC, Minnesota, Texas, Pennsylvania. We shared our travel stories and enjoyed getting to know them.

We saw more wildlife - African buffalo herds, cheetahs, leopards, vultures, francolin (a bird), storks, wildebeests, wart hogs, kingfisher (no relation to our family!), guinea fowl, violet breasted roller (my favorite bird), pelicans. It's really not about seeing certain animals or witnessing a kill or watching animals devour their kill. It's about the beauty of them and how they live in

their environment. I think visiting a zoo will not be easy for me after seeing all these creatures freely roaming the bush.

On a cold morning game drive at Chitabe Lediba, I looked down at my lap to reach for my camera, and it wasn't there. It had slipped off my poncho. Musho stopped the Land Rover; we looked everywhere; it was gone. So he retraced our tracks. Within 15 minutes, a fellow traveler saw it on the side of a sandy road, unharmed. I was elated. Lesson learned - wear the strap tighter around my wrist!

South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana were our destinations, the city, the falls and the safari camps. It was a trip of a lifetime. Waiting for our plane to depart from Johannesburg airport, we heard cheers and screams and loud horns blowing all over the airport - South Africa had just scored a goal in the first World Cup Game. Everyone was so excited, and we were excited to return to our beautiful home (after a 18 hour plane ride) in the wooded state of Connecticut, the United States of America.