**Diary January 2020**

**10th 11th 12th January**

I have not been looking forward to this trip after 18 months absence and two hip replacements. I have lost a lot of confidence in my physical abilities and Tanzania is not the easiest place in the world for moving around on foot. I think I have had to distance myself somewhat from the Usalama family and I had also had enough of the constant aggravation from the authorities. So we set off with a lot of misgivings.

The first part of the trip went according to plan. Terminal 3 at Heathrow was a complete madhouse and we were glad to get onto the plan for the first leg overnight. When we arrived at Dubai we were stacked in the air for about 1 ½ hours without any explanation. We landed in a very wet Dubai but still no indication of what was to come. We had a 6 hour stopover so we thought we had plenty of time to get ourselves to the correct place for the next flight. Silly us! Firstly there was no mention of our flight on the information boards. Everyone we asked had no idea what we were talking about and could find no mention of our flight anywhere. Slowly it began to dawn on us that the whole airport was in a state of total crisis and chaos. People were queuing everywhere for information. There was no signing anywhere and it is an enormous airport. We went round and round in circles trying to find out what the hell was going on. Mike left me in a pretty little Lebanese café and went in search again of some correct information. After an hour he was back having finally discovered where we had to go. We made our way to a train and were whisked to another terminal. More chaos greeted us. Hundreds of irate and increasingly frustrated people were standing around at the gates and no one was saying anything.

The cause of this madness was a massive storm overnight that had completely flooded the airport. The airport is in the desert and the amount of rain experienced was unprecedented. They had no means of clearing the runways as there is no drainage. The water was over the top of cars and was in some places deep enough to threaten the engines of the huge aircraft. We finally were boarded about six hours late and headed onto Entebbe. Meanwhile we were trying to keep Sylvester informed about our arrival time in Kilimanjaro via What’s App as we didn’t want him standing around waiting for us for hours on end. When we got to Entebbe we thought we would have just an hour to wait but then we were all told to disembark and would have to wait yet another four hours. We were given a voucher for a drink and a small cake thing which was revolting. By now we had gone without sleep for nearly 48 hours. We ran foul of the usual petty beaurocracy yet again and I am ashamed to admit that I finally lost my temper. I thought I was in real trouble but was lucky to get away with it just.

We finally arrived in Kilimanjaro at 8.00am totally exhausted and looking like the walking dead. Fortunately we cleared immigration quickly and all our bags were present and correct. Sylvester had sent Max to pick us up. He had been waiting seven hours for us poor man. We made it to Arusha almost without issue apart from some drunken idiot heading down the carriageway in the wrong direction and heading directly towards us. Max managed to avoid a head on collision. After such a nightmare trip it would have been a pity to have been wiped out on the last leg. We had a quick breakfast and retired to our room to unpack and sleep. I opened my case to find that a carton of longlife milk had exploded over all my clothes. Then I discovered that my tin of talcum powder had also broken and had gone everywhere. One of my mugs for a much needed cuppa had also broken. I attempted to rinse out some of the clothes but they never recovered and I had to get them laundered as they stank to high heaven.

I had asked Catherine not to come today o we could rest. However she appeared at around 3.00pm maintaining that she thought I had forgotten my Swahili and had said come tomorrow when I meant today. But it was lovely to see here after so long and she was clearly very happy to see me after so long. She has missed me very badly. We soon settled back into the old relationship with lots of chatter and laughing and general catching up on everything. She is worried that Anna may decide to take off to be with Festo in Dar; she is so desperate to have a baby and is not getting any younger. I gather she is 38 but I still think of her as being in her twenties. I hope this doesn’t happen but if it dos we will have to deal with it. I think we would ask Teddy if she wants to increase her hours to full time which Catherine thinks she probably would. Catherine has had to do a lot of extra work during Anna’s miscarriage problems. But there are now only three kids resident in the house during term time which makes life easier and during the holidays the older ones pitch in and help so it’s not as onerous as it could be.

Catherine’s Mum died in June aged 97. Catherine gave us a lovely description of her death which I think is worth repeating. She was staying at Catherine’s brother but on the Friday requested to go home to her village as she felt her time was near. So she was taken home. On the Monday Catherine spoke to her on the phone at lunch time. She asked her Mum if she was dying and apparently her Mum found this highly amusing according to the woman caring for her Mum. Later that afternoon her Mum demanded to be showered – this was normally not something she agreed to – and wanted to wear her best dress and necklace. She asked to put outside in her wheelchair to watch the village kids playing. Then she was brought back into her hut and Catherine’s sister-in-law went to get something to make her some soup. She had only been gone a short while when she was called back. The carer had been preparing food and meanwhile the carer’s child came home from school and went to play with the old lady in her bed. She shouted loudly and the old lady was dead. It seems to me that this was a perfect death in her own home surrounded by her family with no great drama and medical intervention.

All our children seem to be doing well at school. This year is a critical year for six of them so I hope they continue to work hard. Elia will be taking his form 4 national exams (O-Levels) and has already said he wants to stay on into the sixth form at his current school. Joram will be doing his Standard 7 exams and then will progress to secondary school. The 4 at Aldersgate will be doing Form 2 exams which are important as the results determine what subjects they will take on to Forms 3 & 4. They are so highly motivated they put many UK kids to shame. They value their education so highly. Education is worth more than gold!

#Catherine left about 6.00pm – it had rained really heavily most of the afternoon. We were both on our knees by this time so had a quick dinner and retired in exhausted heaps to bed.

**Monday January 13th**

The day started badly. My phone battery had gone flat overnight and so the alarm didn’t go off, so we overslept until 10.25 and Catherine was arriving at 11.00am.. We had missed breakfast and had nothing to drink, so as soon as she arrived we decamped to Africafe for a pot of tea. I am extremely nervous moving around here in case I fall and damage my new hips so everything is done in slow motion. The pavements are lethal. But I survived the day reasonably well all things considered. But the conditions out of town are very poor due to the huge amount of rainfall at the moment so moving around up where Usalama House is will be a challenge. And that is assuming that we can get someone to take us up to the house at all in these current conditions. It I pouring as I write. We are supposed to be going up tomorrow and so is Julieth so we have to get there somehow. I fear that my visits to the house will be minimal on this occasion.

The subject of gay relationships came up at some point during our chatting – I can’t remember why or how but it was interesting to see Catherine’s reactions. Homosexuality is illegal in this country and people risk imprisonment if they are discovered to be gay, be they men or women. Catherine was horrified that in the UK, Europe and the USA gay relationships are generally accepted and open and that in the UK we now have legalised gay marriage. I challenged her thinking by suggesting to her that anyone of our children could be gay for all we know and how would she feel about that? Would she love them less or make them an outcast etc? I also pointed out that one of our major fundraisers is quite openly gay and she was really shocked. I said to her does that mean he is any less of a good person having raised a lot of money for us and she thought for a moment and then said that of course he was still a good man regardless. I feel she has moved already in her thinking about the subject. It brought to mind an incident many years ago regarding a little girl who was H.I.V. positive who had been brought to Julieth’s place. Catherine was a nursery teacher there at that time. Catherine was horrified that Julieth had accepted the child and tried to make me persuade Julieth to change her mind. Obviously I refused and there then followed a good deal of explanation and information about the whole HIV issue and within a few hours she had completely changed her thought processes and subsequently we accepted an HIV positive child without any question or worry on her part. She is a deep thinker that one.

We then had to go to the bank to exchange money. All the bureaux de change have been shut down by the government so the banks are the only option. I guess this is way of making more for the banks and trying to ensure that financial regulations are followed. So we queued as usual, filled out mountains of paper as usual and the clerk faffed around as usual. I know that the country is doing it’s very best to streamline procedures and processes but they just seem to manage to make more work for themselves and increase beaurocracy in all areas.

By now we were all really hungry so we hurried (slowly) down to Maasai market to meet up with Mama Grace. We went immediately to the little café. We all had a substantial meal and a soda each for £3.00 in total. I had paid nearly twice as much at Africafe for three teas. And the food is excellent. I then mooched around in Mama Grace’s shop and started to collect together lots of goodies to bring home for selling at markets this year. Mama Grace decided she would head off to Kenya that instant to collect more new items for me to have a look at later in the week. This is not a light excursion but involves buses, immigration rules and no sleep for the next 24 hours but she insisted on going so she went. She hitched a ride on a motor bike to the immigration office; she couldn’t actually fit the helmet on her head due to her current elaborate hairdo. So I will return for more shopping delights later in the week. We are having to be careful as to how much we can bring back because of weight restriction. I plan on ditching most of my clothes so we can get everything back home.

We then slowly walked back to town and went to the phone company offices. The queues had died down so Catherine managed to re-register my local sim in her name so that the number does not get taken away from me due to lack of use. More beaurocracy of course and involving finger printing for some reason. On reflection this could be because many people cannot read or write but can make a finger print. Catherine then headed back home taking Mike’s phone with her to try and get a new sim card without us having to wait for many more hours in another queue. We walked back to Equator Hotel via Africafe for a large slice of cake and a pot of tea to celebrate our survival of the first full day in this tough neck of the woods. I shall not eat again tonight but Mike has disappeared downstairs to eat another curry and no doubt partake in a couple of safari beers. The rain has subsided for now.

PS. My milk soaked trousers from the incident in the suitcase stink so badly despite my feeble washing attempts so I have had to send them for washing – I currently have nothing else to wear. But we do now have a new mug and some milk so I shall now treat myself to a decent cup of earl grey tea and take a shower. Fingers crossed that we make to the house tomorrow.

**Tuesday January 14th**

We woke this morning feeling almost back to normal after the horrendousness of the trip out here. Driver Sylvester collected us at 10.30am to take us up to the house. Given the amount of rain recently, the roads were not as bad as e feared and we got there without too many problems. We just had to walk the last few yards. We arranged for Sylvester to come back for us at 4.30pm. I am definitely wimping out of a half hour walk to the dala dala on poor surfaces and then enduring the dala dala. I am not prepared at this point in my operated life to take any risks – one fall in this environment and I am minced meat. Maybe next time I will be a bit more confident in my physicality.

Catherine, Anna and T eddy were there to greet us and Charlie the dog clearly remembered me even though I haven’t seen him for 19 months bless him. Teddy was looking well. Her little boy Elkana is one month younger than Grandson Jacob but is probably about half his weight. The diet must account for the size difference of Western kids and African children.

Anna was not looking as well as she used to. The trauma of having two miscarriages must be taking its toll and she was quieter than usual although she was never noisy. She is not getting any younger and appears to have some gynae problem but I am not sure what that is. Talk of stitching and total bed rest if she gets pregnant again is worrying on several counts. Before Julieth arrived we had a discussion with Catherine about whether or not the charity should continue to fund Julieth for £100 pcm. She always appears to be doing really well with sponsorship but Catherine said that her real problem is money for food. So after talking about it we decided to continue. We are struggling as a charity to keep pace with our increasing education costs and at the end of the day we will have to put our kids first.

Julieth arrived looking as lovely as ever. We spent an awful lot of time hearing about the latest stupidities of the current government as regards regulations for children’s homes. They are determined to make things as hard as possible for everyone concerned. They totally disregard the fact that we and many, many other people are doing the work to help the Tanzanian kids – they should jolly well be paying us not the other way around. I was shocked at the state of our front garden. All the trees had gone and all the pots of plants also. This is because Catherine was commanded to put in an open play area for the children. Most of them are at school, they had adequate space for play and relaxation and they are not babies any more. Our youngest Joshua is now nearly ten. Julieth had us in stitches describing how she lied to the authorities. She supposedly has nine staff to include a guard, a gardener, a cleaner, a cook, a caregiver, a nurse, a social worker, a manager and a director. They obviously could not possibly have believed her but as long as they hear the right words they are happy. Our licence is still not forthcoming because we refused to take another child. We simply do not have the money. The authorities bleat on and on about how many children are needed placements whilst at the same time threatening to take away settled and happy children if you do not follow the stupidest and petty regulations. Apparently Julieth at one point turned round and said “OK- take them all now.” They went very quiet and nothing more was said. She called their bluff and that occasion it paid off. A risky strategy but if needs must …………………….

Sylvester has had a lot to say about this government. Elections are due in October this year and many people are not going to vote because there are no opposition parties left to vote for. The government has put down any attempts at opposition was various means including murder, attempted murder and people disappearing without trace. Some democracy that is. They have gone over the top with taxation so that many small businesses are going to the wall hence creating more poverty rather than less. And what is the tax being spent on? Not education, or health, or social welfare: aeroplanes!!! As far as health is concerned the latest hair brained scheme is to enforce some sort of health insurance on people. No insurance will mean no health care. It will cost about £18 per year for a child; this may not seem a lot but it is a considerable amount when you are on the breadline making less than $1.5 a day at subsistence level. And for the likes of us it would add yet another cost o already increasing outgoings. It is not clear to me yet that this is actually going to happen but if it does we shall be looking for healthcare sponsorship for our youngsters. Any one reading this who might like to contribute in this way do please get in touch via the usual channels.

I realise that I have written very little about the children so maybe tomorrow I will remedy this. We are still trying to find some way of getting to see the four who are miles away at boarding school. To endure a three hour bus ride there and another three back in a cramped, unroadworthy vehicle is not a great proposition but we may have to resort to that as taking a car is more than we can afford. I will feel dreadful if we don’t get to see them. The youngest four don’t come back from school until after 5.00pm so we won’t see them unless we get up there at the weekend. All in all life in complicated and frustrating here but I am doing my level best not to get wound up and upset by it all. We can only do what is possible and I have to accept that. Oh to be wealthy with unlimited resources.

**Wednesday 15th and Thursday 16th**

Well, today and yesterday have been trying, testing and downright challenging to say the least. Mike woke feeling really unwell so decided to stay in bed. He’d been up several times in the night with the runs – I put it down to his partaking of some sort of mutton curry the night before. However as the day wore on he felt worse and worse and was running a high temperature. Meanwhile Catherine and I went down to Mama Grace to do some more shopping and inspect things she had brought back from Kenya. A really quirky Santa Claus riding on a zebra caught my eye. I will put a picture up on Facebook – I can only bring back a few so if anyone wants one they need to reserve quickly – a snip at £4-95.

The heavens opened yet again. Julieth was on her way to meet us at a lawyer’s office in the Arusha Convention Centre so we contacted Mike as I knew he was keen to attend this meeting. He didn’t sound good but insisted he wanted to come. So we found a tuk tuk and picked Mike up on our way to the centre. Within two minutes Mike said he was going to throw up and promptly did so. I had a carrier bag with a hole in the bottom which caught some of it but a lot went on the floor. The driver was very understanding and I paid him extra for cleaning. So we turned around and dropped Mike back to the hotel. Naturally Catherine and Julieth were communicating about where to meet and naturally neither of them appeared to know where we should go. Eventually we found each other; the rain was still pouring down. Finally we managed to find our way to the lawyer’s office and he showed up not long after. I must mention that the lift in the centre was scary. Doors opened and closed at alarming speed and the lift seemed to move extremely quickly.

We had a long chat with the lawyer. Apparently our Company (not for profit) is no longer valid – a new government law brought in without telling anyone. This puts us in a precarious position with the government. We want to gift the house and land to Catherine and this is a problem as you cannot gift to non-relatives. As the company is dead and the house and land are in the name of the company this presents further problems. A dead man cannot sell land. So the lawyers are having to try and find a way round this mess that isn’t going to cost us an arm and a leg. Catherine had brought the wrong papers with her so she had to find someone to go up to the house, collect the papers from Anna and bring them to us. This involved another trip in the lift to meet the courier. Catherine panicked and dashed out of the lift leaving me in the lift going up and down until I finally got out at the right place. I could hear her howling with laughter during my up and down trip. Anyway, we have had to leave everything with the lawyer and hope to goodness they find some way round this mess – whatever happens I think it’s going to be costly and the lawyer refused to give me an estimate for his fee. Julieth assures me that as her friend he will be kind to us. I do hope so.

We returned to the hotel and found Mike in a right state. He was burning up and almost incoherent. He refused to allow us to take him to a doctor. So I persuaded him to take paracetamol and he has been drinking a lot which is good. Today (Thursday) he seems a little better but still in bed and still not eating. I have been diddling about passing time. I might venture down to Mama Grace in a while. We hope to hear something back from the lawyers later today. We need to move fast with these issues – we leave next Wednesday and the Government could cause us more problems if it’s not resolved quickly before they get their teeth into us. This government is impacting fast on all sectors of society and everyone including us is running scared of them. They are abusing power without question. I will write more later if I get further news.

About 4.00pm Mike arose from his sick bed and seemed to have more or less recovered from whatever was bugging him. He showered and shaved and looked pretty much human again. Poor Juliet appeared in a panic – she had been at the wretched bank trying to change her money and the idiots had rejected any notes with the slightest flaw. So I managed to replace the notes with pristine ones and will insist in future that my bank only give me new notes as I had also had the same problem. Still we heard nothing from the lawyers. We went for a light meal to Africafe – I had forbidden Mike to partake of further curry until totally back to normal. When we got back I called Catherine and Julieth to be told that the news was bad but to not worry – fat chance of that – I had a sleepless night and a major headache. We were instructed to stay put here tomorrow morning until someone from somewhere would come and talk about next steps. Massive anxiety levels and great fear and dread of what would happen next. It’s awful being in the dark with no clue as to what is going on. But I have to trust my girls that they will do the right things – they usually do in the end and both deserve medals in these unchartered waters.

**Friday January 19th**

Under instructions from Catherine Mike and I sat like good children and waited for someone to show up. We do a lot of that. Eventually she and Julieth appeared in a right state. They had been tramping all over the town trying to find another lawyer. Whatever the current lawyer had said on the phone to them and spooked them and they were trying to be pre-emptive. However we had to go back to see him as he had all our documents and the girls wanted us to hear what he had had to say. So off we went and got to his office unscathed having got wise to the vagaries of the dangerous lift. He went through everything with us and seemed to think there was no way out of the mess and we would end up having to pay thousands of pounds in fines to the vile government. For what I have no idea. He said he was not prepared to take any short cuts as it could come back on him in years to come. Mike then pointed out that Faraja Support Ltd does not possess a bank account and there has never been any financial activity associated with the company. It was purely set up to enable us to buy the land for the house back in 2012. I thought we had explained all this already but suddenly the lawyer changed his June and said there was now a green light. He said we should go away and wait for an hour whilst he consulted yet again with people. So we did. We found a nearby café and sat there for two hours getting more and more tired and bored. Catherine rang and he said we should return to the hotel and they would be with us shortly. So we did that as well.

They did actually return and explained that they can now go ahead and sort out the company and the transfer of the house for about £850 total. I really do not understand how this is going to happen but he seemed confident. I had to fill out some paperwork and they have agreed to let us transfer money to his account when we return to the UK next week. He also said that Monday he wanted to come up and visit the house and land to put a rough value on it. According to Catherine and Julieth the government has hit ordinary people so hard financially that land prices have fallen as no one has any money so this could work in our favour I think. Papers will be drawn up and someone will be sent to Dar to beg forgiveness of the government. For what again I have no idea but so be it. I just hope that all this will work out properly in the fullness of time. It will be a great burden lifted from our shoulders and Catherine and the children will be totally secure for the future regardless of what happens in the UK.

We were all really hungry so we bought the girls a slap up dinner which they deserved and they thoroughly enjoyed their meal. Julieth loved the very hot sauce and got a piece of tin foil and filled it with the leftover sauce to take home. I hope it didn’t leak all over her handbag. I find all this waiting and uncertainty emotionally draining. Sitting around waiting is surprisingly tiring. So Mike went and bought cake and we returned early to our room and I watched GoT to soothe my troubled breast. We have another long and testing day tomorrow leaving here very early (for us) so hopefully we will get a good night’s sleep and be bright eyed and bushy tailed in the morning. There is yet again no internet access so can’t post this now. Another day maybe. Hang on – it’s back so will try and post now.

**Saturday January 18th**

Catherine had managed to persuade a very kind neighbour with a car to take us the 100 miles to Babati to see the four who are boarding school there in the second year of secondary school. We just paid him the cost of the fuel. But it saved us spending an arm and a leg on a taxi or suffering the rigours of a ghastly bus trip which I frankly could not stomach. The neighbour has two kids in the sixth form at the same school so he benefitted as well. It is extremely hot and humid here at the moment – the air is so thick with moisture it is hard to breathe. The road from here to there wasn’t too bad apart from the scary approach to driving that is taken and constant road blocks due to breakdowns of lorries and buses. It took us over three hours to get there having left at 8.00am. The area we drove through is usually dry and arid but was greener than I have ever seen it with massive ponds of water so the Maasai that graze their cattle on these lands will be happy and the cows will be fat.

The kids were extremely surprised to see us and were quite quiet to start with. I got the impression that Mercy seemed unhappy but she was reluctant to open up. I questioned Goodluck who said she had been crying a lot and there was some sort of problem with a friend. Catherine then joined in the cross-examination and it transpired that Mercy was being quite badly bullied by a so called friend. This bullying took the form of name calling and the abuse of our kids who are orphans. Our lovely neighbour, also a teacher, went in search of a friend of his at the school and also brought his 18 year old daughter over to act as a supportive link for Mercy. We live in hope that this “friend” will be properly dealt with and this bullying stops. Mercy is a gentle girl and takes everything very much to heart. I said she should imagine this girl as an ant that she crush under foot if she so wishes. It seems that all of them are doing pretty well with their studies. We met the maths teacher who w setting them all quite high targets. The school seems to work them very hard and they have precious little spare time. Probably just as well as it stops them getting too homesick.

Dominic, our little artist, went and fetched a friend of his from Form 4 and the friend proudly showed us some very good pencil drawings of various football stars including Leicester’s Jamie Vardy. He is encouraging Domi to draw more which is great. Goodluck was the same as ever – the broad smile lights up the space around him. He was put in charge of sorting out the money matters for everyone. We had to cough up for extra exercise books as well as pocket money for them all. The cost in money and time for them coming backwards and forwards five times a year is not insignificant and adds to our huge expenditure on their education. Always we need more and more money. Aron is just the same as ever – apart from getting very tall. His hugs are like bear hugs. They are all so affectionate and quite happy to demonstrate their feelings in public. Domi is extra good at blowing kisses when we leave. We spent about two hours with them which was better than nothing and I think it was worth the effort overall. It just upsets them when we leave but I guess that’s part of the growing up process and they trust us all enough to know that we won’t ever abandon them.

Our neighbourly driver tried to find somewhere to stop for a light lunch on the way back. We stopped at what seemed to be an OK place until we saw the food. Mine was more or less inedible so I went hungry for the rest of the day. It seemed to take even longer to get back and it was getting hotter and hotter in the car. The hotel is very full tonight with a trans-Africa group overnighting here and a huge Indian party to welcome a baby into the community is going on downstairs. That must be costing someone an enormous amount of money. The Asian population here are generally pretty well off compared to local people. Tomorrow we are going up to the house to see the youngest children and Grace is coming from college at Tengeru for the day. It will be wonderful to see her again.

**Sunday January 19th**

We went up to the house today. We picked up Grace on the way; she had special dispensation from college to spend the day with us. She is a real young woman now with an incredibly sensible head on her young shoulders. She is also very kind and caring. She is in her second year of a five year course which will give her a bachelor of veterinary medicine qualification. She seems to be working extremely hard and the course is challenging and varied. She is a team leader within her class with quite a lot of extra responsibility. She has already had a good deal of practical experience around cows, which she finds quite scary – she is only a little thing herself. She has had to put her arms up various parts of the cow but assures me they are suitably restrained and can’t run away with grace still attached. She has had to visit abattoirs which is not pleasant but she said that the teachers are very supportive. Mike and I pay for a fees and we are proud of how she is doing. She assures us that when she eventually begins to earn real money she will definitely be helping to support the youngest children with their education.

When we arrived at the house we discovered a young goat tied up and making a hell of a racket. Catherine had removed it yet again from our land where it continually decimates our vegetable crop. The owner of said goat, not a very pleasant character, continues to allow the animal to graze on our land together with his chickens. He appeared to reclaim his goat but Catherine refused to return it until the village chairman has spoken severely to the man and made him promise to restrain the errant animals in future. She was very annoyed indeed with him. Joram was at home with Catherine. He has developed some weird elbow deformity and can’t straighten his left arm. It isn’t painful in anyway luckily. But something will have to be done about it in due course after he has completed his Standard 7 exams in early autumn. At some point a decent doctor will need to found. Jordan is growing tall but still as thin as a rake. He has a typical Maasai body shape. I think he’s behaving well now and trying to do well at school. He is in Standard 5 so has three years left in Primary School. Joshua is another matter. He is our youngest and is causing Catherine a lot of concerns. He is behaving badly at school and at home and seems to have got in with three or four children who behave in similar fashion. He is not taking his lessons seriously and is sulky and uncooperative at home. He is supposed o come directly from school but doesn’t; he vanishes for hours on end with his little ratbag friends. All this is worrying especially as this sort of behaviour was displayed by Johanes in the lead up to his running away and we certainly don’t want that to happen again. We all gave him a bit of a roasting and tried to get through to him that he must behave better and that his education is very important for his future. I hope he has taken it to heart but I fear that it will make very little difference. I think if he continues like this during this academic year we may consider changing him to another school – even a government school – which would free up money for other things. Not a happy state of affairs.

Mike spent a good deal of time trying to get some sort of coherent records of current spending. The costs of education are going up faster than we can keep pace which is worrying. So we need to get a handle on exactly what we need to raise on an annual basis to keep everyone in education and to keep everyone fed and watered and salaried. Never a dull moment and always another headache to add to the many. The chickens seem to be costing more to keep than they are contributing in terms of eggs and meat. Catherine is desperate to keep them but says that their housing situation is inadequate to keep them healthy and happy. We really cannot afford to pay out any more on capital expenditure so again I have no idea what the solution is. It keeps boiling down to money. We left with Grace at about 4.30pm and dropped her at the main road so she could get her bus back to college. We continued back to equator o much needed shows and dinner. Tomorrow it’s back to the house with the lawyers in the morning. Not sure why but who am I……….?

**Monday January 20th**

Why is it impossible for anyone in this wretched country to be on time and organise themselves in a sensible manner? It drives me nuts. So much so that by 11.15am I had already had enough and opted out of the first part of the day’s agenda to preserve my sanity and everyone else’s lives. The lawyer was supposed to pick us up at 10.00am to go up to survey the house. At 10.30am a driver appeared minus lawyer. It was a very battered vehicle to put it mildly. Then we had to drive to his office to collect him and his sidekick. No sign of them so the driver left us locked in the car with temperatures soaring to go and find them. Twenty minutes later they finally all showed up. I was sweating profusely. We then had to squeeze five into the car. But at last we were on our way, or so I thought. Silly me! We turned round and went back the way w had come to get fuel. At that point I announced that I would stay in town and leave Mike and Catherine to deal with whatever needed to be done. There was no way that overladen car would get up to the house with the state of the roads and I had visions of having to abandon the car and walk a goodly distance o get there.

I instead went to the bank to exchange some money. I stood in the line and it was only when I got to the counter that anyone thought to tell us all that the internet was down so no exchange possible. By now it was extremely hot – I guesstimate around 30. I toddled off to find another bank and got our cash. I walked back to the hotel via Africafe and a cuppa and a muffin. In the papers I read that Tanzania now has the strictest rules regarding sim card registration – it outstrips even North Korea. It is basically tuning into a police state.

Meanwhile up at the house Mike and Catherine were having a total nightmare. The lawyers were digging into various documents and coming up with more and more reasons as to why it would be almost impossible to sort out the house ownership once and for all. The problem all along has been the not-for-profit company set up in 2012 purely as a vehicle for purchasing the land to build the house on. As non-Tanzanians we were not able to buy land ourselves so set up the company as a means to an end. This company has lain dormant ever since. But the new government and its’ stringent rules is now causing us and many like us problems. By the time thy got back to Equator Mike and Catherine were seriously depressed and so was I by the time they had filled me in on what had happened.

Later in the day the lawyers returned and filled me in on all the pitfalls and problems. These included the possibility of me being sent to prison for absconding with the grand sum of £3.00 from a non-existent bank account. Don’t ask – it’s far too complicated to explain. Then, having totally deflated us all, they came up with the simplest and quickest solution possible. I think it felt like some sort of horrible torture; give them as much bad news as possible so that when the good news finally appeared they will agree to anything. It all seemed highly suspect to me but if the lawyers were prepared to put their necks on the line for us who are we to disagree. They left and said they would return tomorrow (our last full day) with the papers for signing. Mike and I were totally emotionally drained and went to Africafe for tea and cake for our evening meal. It is extremely hot here now and sleeping is hard. It is made worse by an invasion of thousands of tiny and extremely annoying insects. Being dive bombed half the night but these creatures makes sleep even more difficult. I have a permanent headache and shall be glad to get home to a warm comfortable bed with a cool environment and no wildlife to keep me awake.

**Tuesday January 21st**

We had been instructed to stay put until we were contacted by someone t some point. So we obedient and spent a couple of hours sitting around. We knew the girls were somewhere in town and eventually they appeared. My wardrobe had shrunk to nothing so I had my one remaining black and white dress on and Julieth seemed to want to know what my favourite colours were. Very strange behaviour. Eventually at about 12.45 the lawyers appeared again with the new papers they had drawn up on their various laptops. We checked them through as thoroughly as possible and picked up various errors. There seemed to be lots of email contact going on with another lawyer at the office. The whole thing left us thoroughly bemused and none of it made much sense to us and it all appeared to be thoroughly irregular to say the least. But if it means that we finally secure the house and land for Catherine and the children so be it. The original sales papers have been redrawn to appear as a direct sale between the vendor and Catherine, thus removing all trace of Faraja Support Ltd. From the equation. The vendor has agreed to resign the papers – he is away at his shamba at the moment but will definitely sign when he returns. Until that is actually completed I will continue to live on my nerves and everyone has said they will let us know as soon as this happens.

The lawyers went away and promised to return again at 5.00 with the final documents for everyone to sign. Catherine and Julieth then demanded that we retire to our room; Mike was told to stay downstairs. Some sort of girl talk I thought. They sat me on the bed and produced from a bag a beautiful dress in a deep maroon as a gift for me. They had clearly gone to a lot of trouble to find something they thought would suit me and even had got the size perfect. I was really touched by this gesture. It must have cost a lot for them and they had spent a lot of time running around the shops early in the morning. They are such sweet girls. So hard working and so loving and caring of the children in their care as well as to us. We took lots of pictures and I was made to parade myself in front of Mike. By now it was very hot indeed and the dress was very warm but I didn’t have the heart to change so remained in it for the rest of the day.

We bought them a very late lunch and awaited the return of the lawyers. Finally they appeared again – three of them this time – and we again checked them through for any errors. There is an extremely annoying and somewhat dim waitress working at the hotel who constantly butted in to ask about drinks etc. She really has no sense of when it is appropriate to appear given that it was pretty obvious that there was an important meeting going on. Silly girl and irritates the hell out of me. Anyway finally the papers were signed and just await the vendors’ signatures upon his return. They left and we were left somewhat shell-shocked. Catherine and Juliet departed and we were left looking at each other in disbelief that something that had started out as incredibly complicated and depressing could now have been resolved comparatively simply. Mike decided he simply had to have a final curry and I decided I could not face it so he went and had his curry and I went down to Africafe for my spaghetti and juice. We reconvened in our room at about 8.00pm and had a go at packing.

We have been plagued by thousands of horrible insects in the room – they seem to have appeared over the last few days because of the extreme heat and humidity. They don’t bite but they dive bomb you when you are in bed. Most unpleasant. I spent a good deal of time squashing the damn things and then decided to leave the bathroom light on in the hope they would be attracted to the light and away from me. That seemed to work so we got a little rest despite the suffocating heat.

**Wednesday January 22nd/Thursday 23rd**

We got up and had our last breakfast. We managed to finish packing and ended up within a few grams of our weight allowance. I have left virtually all our clothes with Catherine who will distribute them amongst anyone who can use them. I was dreading the return journey after the nightmare of the trip out. But I couldn’t wait to be cool again and feel clean again. My hair has been a total mess the whole time we have been here – the humidity and the water seem to have a very bad effect on the hair. I had given up on wearing any semblance of makeup as it just melted off my face so felt and looked every year of my advancing years. Julieth’s grandmother is now 111 so I have some way to go to catch her up. She is remarkable. She still walks miles and miles. She still carries heavy weights on her head and cares for her beloved cow. She has never used any medicines apart from local potions and I am sure she doesn’t worry about her hair and face so I have something to learn there. She actually looks younger than Julieth’s mother who is well into her seventies.

Catherine came at about 12.00. She does her best to be brave but feels our leaving very deeply. She really misses our regular visits but money and time mean that we will only visit about once a year in future. But we will try to go out again late November so we are there when the children are on school holidays for Christmas. Mama Grace appeared about 15 minutes before we were due to leave with a few last minute bits to shove into to our hand luggage and then Silvester arrived promptly at 2.00. I noticed Mama Grace saying a few prayers over our bags in the boot – she prays for good sales so that we can continue to earn funds for the children. Catherine got in and we gave her a lift to Sanawari on our way to the airport. Silvester regaled us most of the way to the airport with the local gossip including a very sad story about an Ex Pat woman who married a local man from a wealthy family a couple of years ago. It transpired that he was extremely controlling, extremely unfaithfully and even more extremely dangerous. The result of the unfortunate union was that the woman’s house was burnt to the ground and she had to flee the country with her children for her own safety. Sadly not a unique story. Many ex-pat divorcees seem to end up marrying local men (generally a lot younger) and very often these marriages end in disaster with violence as part of the mix. We arrived at the airport without incident and said our farewells to Silvester. Check-in was uneventful. My new hips seem to like setting off the security alarms so I had to be searched several times throughout the trip home. I did offer to take my trousers off to show them the scars but they declined. A three hour stay in Nairobi – pitsville airport and then another three hour stopover in Dubai and we arrived back in a very cold London on time. The tedious drive back home was also straightforward but slow and we finally got back around 4.00pm. Unpacking didn’t take long; I had very little washing as we had left everything in Tanzania. A very welcome hot shower and a comfy bed with a hot water bottle was all I wanted. It was a trying, confusing trip but overall I hope the outcomes will be OK. Just got to keep the money coming in now.

**P.S.**

Since our return home we have heard that Aron is playing up badly at Aldersgate School. Apparently this has been going on for some time but we weren’t informed. Aron has never caused us any worries. He has been the easiest of them all so clearly something has happened to kick him off. I personally think that he is incredibly homesick and too far away from home. With Mercy struggling also we have made the decision to move them back to Arusha as soon as is feasible to Edmund Rice where the older ones have attended quite happily. That means that next year we will have to find the money for six children. Elia will be in the sixth form equivalent, Joram will be starting in Form One and Mercy, Goodie, Aron and Domi will be in Form Three.

The school is much more expensive but we cannot allow our children to go off the rails for the sake of a few pounds. Therefore we are going to have to double our fundraising efforts to afford the fees. We would appreciate anyone who is either able to do a little fundraising for us or who could undertake to pay the fees or part of the fees for one of the children Annually the approximate cost per child will be around £700and costs are rising. That figure does not include uniforms, books and extras such as exam charges etc.

We really are very worried about funding at the moment so please have a think and if you can help us to help them do get in touch. We really do appreciate the cohort of regular donors who have stuck with it in the long term. Maybe we don’t say thank you often enough but please know that we really value all contributions large or small and the kids and staff in Tanzania are well aware of the number of people here in the UK that offer them financial support.

THANK YOU – ASANTE!!