

Kalahari Safari - 1999

This will be the Journal of our trip to Namibia in June of 1999. To our amazed delight, we will go once again to the continent we learned to love! The anticipation is thrilling; we expect the event to be even better!

Tom hopes to take just a few antelope: an oryx, a blesbok, a hartebeest, perhaps a springbok and a mountain zebra; Linda longs to see cheetah (a possibility, although they are very shy); giraffe, (a much better probability); a chameleon, not at all likely, as it is winter hibernation time for them and, most the improbable of all, she yearns to see the wild flowers of the desert bloom, which does not happen in the winter months.

January, 1999:

Arrangements are finalized with our P.H., Joof Lamprecht and Steve Turner of Gracy Travel International, who will book our flights. We will go on Safari during the first two weeks of June.

February, 1999:

Tom calls Merle Trail, our taxidermist, to ask him to get shipping tags ready. These will be used to properly route the trophies from Namibia to his shop in Hancock, Maryland.

Linda arranges for malaria medication, which we will take before, during and after the trip. Malaria can be a problem in the northern part of Namibia - better safe than sorry..Rx's for a good antibiotic, pain medication, gastro-intestinal problems and a couple of sleeping pills for those 14 hour flights will complete our basic medical kit. This part of Africa does not necessitate all of the shots and pills that Zimbabwe did - to our delight! Also, medical care in Namibia is reputed to be excellent.

March, 1999:

Time to send the rest of the funds to Joof, via bank transfer. The mails in Namibia are not on a par with the medical care.

We are collecting various items of clothing, in dark khaki and dull greens, appropriate to this land of bright sunlight, tall grass and dusty thorn bush.. Light colors tend to be too bright for effective stalking. As before, laundry will be done daily in camp, so few clothes are needed there. Good boots and layers of clothing for colder nights and mornings are predictable necessities.

A new video camera, with much improved technology, is added to L's little arsenal of cameras. A small handheld computer, a NEC Mobilepro 700, will be the workhorse for journaling on this trip, sparing better computers the dust and sand inherent in a desert environment. Running on AA batteries, it is the perfect camp companion. Palmella, the ever-faithful 200LX, will also make the trip, having participated in the preparations for this trip, as she had in 1995 for Zimbabwe.

T's weapon will be Old Death Ray - his much traveled .338 Winchester Magnum (named for the big French bottle of wine!), which Greg Wolf has accurized for the occasion. Only this one rifle will make the trip this time, at Joof's insistence, since the antelope that T. hopes to take can be taken effectively with this caliber. If we add birds to the list we will borrow a shotgun from Joof for the purpose.

("Old Death Ray" received that name — taken from a weapon featured in the old Buck Rogers cartoons - on a moose hunt in Newfoundland in 1960: when it stopped a moose charge abruptly, Dr. Charlie Ball said, "Mah Gawd Tawm, that thang is a death ray!")

April, 1999

From Gracy Travel comes a massive packet of paper - every possible question about travel arrangements answered, including some we never thought to ask! Also, all of the plane tickets for American Airlines and South African Airways. Suddenly Africa seems more real - more imminent!

T. & Joe Massey set up the bench rest and test fire Old Death Ray. Thanks to Greg Wolf's fine work, it shoots a tight group at precisely 100 yards - Joof's specifications for hunting his area.

May, 1999

The big duffels come up from the basement and the lists of To Do's begin to sprout on L's desk, dressing table and computers.

An open house at the Alan and Mary Jackson's: they have just returned from a safari at the very place we are going. We have a wonderful time, meeting 2 other couples who are friends of theirs and looking at pictures of our future - the beautiful lodge and the surrounding terrain of Namibia. There were also some impressive portraits of Alan with his trophies. We come home much encouraged and really psyched - come on June 1st!

To Customs: we take the rifle and the video camera to BWI and register them with Customs. The procedure is quick and easy and somehow makes the trip seem more real and more immediate. We leave the airport rejoicing!

At Joof's request, L. adds a big Toshiba laptop computer to the list of gear to go, to replace one that was stolen from their son Jozef's dorm room at college. T. volunteers to carry it - it will all fit in somehow.

More packing, more malaria pills and travelers' checks, phone calls and still more packing. T. practices twice more with Old Death Ray, using shooting sticks, which is how he will shoot in Namibia, L. works with the video camera another time. And so the preparations proceed.

Sunday, May 30th

And now, we are under way! We will spend the night near the airport - BWI - due to the early hour of our flight to New York on Monday. L. sends farewells via E-mail to various computer buddies and friends and we have talked to family on the phone. Now we do all the last minute things and in the afternoon we drive to the Marriott Hotel. Here we reside, temporally, in great comfort. It is a strange little half-step on the long journey that is called Going to Africa - and we are thrilled to be beginning that journey again and at last.

Monday, May 31st

What an early start! We organize things somehow, drop off the car at Fast-Park and are taken in a van to the airport. We squeeze into a tiny American Eagle plane, bound for New York. At JFK, we locate our luggage and make the long walk to the South African Airways desk. At last we are at the gate and waiting for that 14 hour flight to Johannesburg.

Our flight begins to board and we see, from the airport window, that improbable flying building that is the 747-400 - the same type of plane that we flew on to Zimbabwe in 1995. It is 2 stories tall and looms massively at the end of its gangway, swallowing passengers in vast numbers, without pause. To L., whose heart belongs to small bush planes, particularly those on floats, this is not a pretty sight. Still, it is solid and grand and it will, against all odds, lift off into the skies and take us all to Africa.

On a flight so long, it is almost like moving into a small, temporary home for a while. And thanks to Steve at Gracy Travel, our flying home is wonderful: on the upper deck, all the way forward, with lots of leg room and a tiny TV monitor built into the bulkhead in front of us, giving us a feeling of exclusivity... The cockpit is the only thing ahead of us, so it seems that we are in a small private world. Indeed, there are fewer seats in this upper section, making it much more comfortable than the cattle car below us. We are fed, shown movies and short subjects, fed some more and we sleep enough over the course of the flight to enable some basic brain functions. We have plenty to read and even find an article in the in-flight magazine on the very area to which we are going. And so the time passes, between the stars and the sea, between our own familiar home and a new adventure.

Tuesday, June 1st

Breakfast is served, papers filled out for immigration and then we are in Johannesburg. As we wend our way through the bureaucratic maze and emerge into the International Departure area to board our ongoing flight, the sounds and sights of Africa take us by surprise: we have missed it more than we knew.

A long layover in an African airport is not a tribulation: listening to the departing flights being called on the loud speaker is wildly romantic (Dar es Salaam, Marrakech, Dakar) and mysterious (where is Blantyre?). The people hurrying by are colorful and exotic - a passing show! At last, we hear Windhoek and we begin the last and shortest leg of the journey.

The world beneath our wings is soon the dry, brown Kalahari Desert - vast and trackless and so remote to our eyes. This is Botswana. Soon it will become Namibia!

We collect the luggage at the Windhoek airport, obtain the certification for the rifle and emerge into the waiting area to find Joof and Marina Lamprecht, waiting and welcoming. We begin the drive to the Ranch. The country is dry, as it is winter, and it is still the Kalahari. There are isolated kopies, hills of rocks and brush. We arrive at the gate to the ranch, named Rooikraal, which means, roughly, red corral in Afrikaans, for the bright red sand of this area. The drive down the track is long and then we behold the beautiful lodge that is their home and that will be ours for two weeks. It is made of the handsome native red and gray stone, the huge curves of the roof thickly thatched, the whole flowing into and over the land, embellished with huge boulders and palms and flowering bushes, set in lawns of brilliant green grass. Our room, on a balcony above a walkway and some garages, is wonderful, with two beds, a stone corner fireplace, a big wardrobe and chairs and tables beneath windows open to the sweet clean air. There is a comfortable bathroom with a shower and huge, thick towels.

We are very travel-weary and the hot water of that shower revives and refreshes us beyond words. We unpack too and bring a little order to our lives. L. readies the video and still cameras and hopes to organize her gear in time to go on the hunt in the morning.

We join Marina and Joof and Hanns-Louis, their youngest son, who is 12, in the lodge, L. trying, as always, to catch up on the Journal, while preferring to join in the conversation. We feel at a little at home already and so glad to be here at last.

Dinner is elegant, proper and delightful, with candles and servants and the food is superb. We will have to watch our waistlines. unless we have good, hard hiking!

Jet-lag and time zones have done their work and we are finished at 8pm. We go to sleep in that comfortable, cozy room...no hyenas calling here...

Wednesday, June 2nd

At 5am we wake and at 5:30 coffee arrives. Breakfast in the dining room and the familiar first morning struggle to find and organize all the necessary gear...cameras, sunglasses, film, sunscreen, hats and Tom's hunting equipment. Important things, but so easy to forget the small details.

We meet Johnny, the head tracker and climb aboard the aged but excellent Toyota Land Cruiser, along with Gina, the lovely yellow Labrador - very pregnant and feeling left out of things, as she is usually the tracker dog but is too close to her delivery. She is allowed to go along today, to her delight and rides with her elbows on the rollbar, nose into the wind, whining with excitement.

We are off, into a world of brilliant sunlight, cloudless blue skies, pale golden grasses and rust red sand. This a place of subtle shadings and fresh, warm winds, with a limitless chain of life, lived among the dim, dusty greens of the camel thorn trees and sheltering brush. The weather is unseasonably mild for this winter season and some of the animals have had late young, compensating for a hard year past. We begin to see game at once, oryx, blesbok, steenbok, springbok, eland, hartebeest, both blue and black wildebeest, kudu, zebra, duiker, hundreds of birds, butterflies and bugs...the whole community of African game has come out to welcome us!

T. must sight in his rifle and so we go to the small range. Here there is a covered bench rest. To his surprise, T. finds that, at this altitude of 5,000 feet, Old Death Ray shoots 3 inches higher than it shot at the same distance, 100 yards, in Maryland! He quickly compensates and shoots well, to Joof's satisfaction.

We walk over the land, getting a feeling for the country. We take a coffee and snack break - real filtered coffee, from a thermos! When we begin again to drive the interlacing network of dirt tracks that binds this vast area into a whole, Joof suddenly swerves and stops the vehicle. When we climb down, there, in the road, posturing fiercely, is a chameleon, the large lizard of Africa, in an unlikely shade of brilliant bright green. His independently articulated eyes are rotating wildly, trying to comprehend these huge invaders in his small, private world. L., who loves these particular animals beyond reason, picks him up, getting a pinched finger for her trouble. He soon calms down, gripping her fingers with his little paddle-paws and we take his portrait and release him into a bush to find shelter and shade. L. is absolutely thrilled with that small, unexpected moment - a gift and a tribute to Joof's sharp eyes!

The wind is too strong to allow a good hunt, but we have had a glorious morning and return to the lodge for lunch in the beautiful outdoor dining room, feeling very happy and pleased with our morning.

Along with Gina, there is Rex, a huge black Labrador and Peanut and L.S. pronounced Ellis, two red miniature dachshunds who are mother and daughter. There are always dogs, inside and out, under foot and under tables...great fun! There is Puddy Tat as well, a cat so large that we think we can hear him coming up the stairs! He plays with all the dogs, fearlessly, giving as good as he gets.

After lunch it is siesta time and time for L. to work on the journal. By the end of this day we will have learned the tempo and the timing of life in this lodge and be more at ease and at home.

We meet in the lounge for coffee at 3pm and then leave again in the Toyota. Hearing Kalahari Desert, we envisioned sand, only sand. Not at all! The soft, feathery grass of the area is tall and always moving in the winds and everywhere little ears are twitching just above it, eyes are peering at us...tiny antelope singly and together. There is a variety of tree and bush, many with those evil thorns we remember well! There are low plants that cling to the soil and wait for moisture to bring them fresh life and flowers. And everywhere there are kudu and oryx, feeding and marching by, unafraid of the vehicle, as no hunting is done from it. Then, there is a pair of jackals, much scorned here as vicious killers of baby animals. Joof asks T. to kill at least one and, with a very long shot, he does so. This will save the lives of many young creatures in the area. We drive a while and then begin to walk again, always the best way to learn the bush. We see oryx cows everywhere and, suddenly, an old male. Joof suggests culling him, producing fine meat for camp and sparing him a slow death. He is very close to us, not aware that we are there, only about 20 yards away. T. takes him easily and we take photos and videos and appreciate the fine, old bull. There is a clever winch on the back of the truck, saving much labor for all. The oryx is pulled into the back of the truck on the cable and we head back to the lodge, into a rose-gold sunset, watched by many eyes. Just outside the yard we are amazed to find a giraffe, towering there by the side of the road! It is serene and watchful. A startling sight, a little surreal. Another of L's wishes has come true.

The most remarkable animal of all those we saw this day was an aardwolf - an astonishing sight, as they are both very rare and also nocturnal. We are truly surprised and thrilled to see him now.

Oh, the food! Tonight, after a happy gathering around the fire pit in the yard, we go to table in the formal dining room, to a fantastic meal that includes a glorious oryx goulash. L. suspects that she will once again run out of adjectives to describe these African experiences.

We are 6 at table: Joof, Marina, Bob Ashfield, the English camp maintenance engineer (who spent a good part of his life as a member of the Jaguar Racing Team), Hanns-Louis, T. & L., making for wide ranging and spirited conversation - no topic is sacred and everyone has opinions...a fine and lively evening and tonight we feel so much better and less brain-dead that we enjoy it all immensely.

Thursday, June 3rd

T. sleeps poorly, visions of all the day's wonders dancing through his mind. Just before waking, L. dreams of rain clouds and suddenly the rains are here - not at all normal in this dry winter world! We watch the grass and the trees around the lodge turning fresher greens, another African miracle!

At breakfast, Joof says that the rain is truly exceptional for this season - another gift for us and the tiny flowers are beginning to bloom - out of season, just for L.!

As we leave the property there is a pair of giraffe, benevolently looming and watching us drive by...we cannot become blasé' ...Africa keeps us excited.

Today our list of wonders includes a pair of tall secretary birds, striding along, many yellow, orange and gray hornbills, blue and black wildebeest, countless tiny steenbok and duiker, blesbok, oryx galore, kudu, ground squirrels, and a big black beetle that L. rescues from a deep hole. Birds fly in clouds and many hunt alone, perching on the tops of the acacia trees, watching for prey. Here, as elsewhere, there are also L.B.J.'s, Joof says: Little Brown Jobs, tiny birds, looking all alike except to each other, unknowable save to experts, which we are not! We can see beautiful raptors, pale chanting goshawks and both gray and blue falcons and kestrels, surveying their world and a tiny scops owl, blinking in a small dead tree. There is a hoopoe, a fantastical bird with a bristling crest of feathers standing upright on its head, dressed in shades of rust and tan with stylish black accents.

The swift showers chase each other across the grasslands and finally we take shelter in a little shed at the base of a wind mill and have coffee while the rain increases and thunder mutters on the hills. When this storm ends, the world is washed and cool and sparkling with droplets and more and more tiny amethyst and sunny yellow flowers are blooming all around us underfoot.

We return for a delicious cold lunch, now with a fire in the fireplace, as the rains have brought us the seasonably cooler air.

Festus is the gardener, the magician who maintains this emerald Oasis of cool foliage and flowers in the desert... He is in his 80's, stooped from his labors, perpetually muttering threats and epithets against the kudu who raid his gardens, munching on his treasured little plantings. We think of the deer at home: smaller villains - similar warfare!

L. has agreed, with pleasure, to set up and house clean the new portable computer for Joof and she plans to show Hanns-Louis some of the tricks of such technology, as he is self-taught and very clever with computers. This seems like a good moment, sandwiched between hunts, to do that job. When Hanns-Louis returns from local school, riding on his four wheeler, she proposes a computing session. He agrees enthusiastically and after lunch they clean up the computer's hard disk and Desktop. This is good fun for L. and Hanns-Louis is a very quick study. They work for an hour, until the time comes to start the hunt again.

At 3pm we meet for coffee with Joof and then, as we drive away, the usual little group of Joof driving, Tom beside him, L. sitting on the high seat with Gina and Johnny standing behind in the truck bed, there we see a large, elderly Oryx bull. Joof asks T. to cull him, as he will die soon and culling allows the old bulls to avoid a slow and painful death by jackals, the predictable demise here, where there are no hyenas. T. makes a fine shot and the oryx runs about 60 yards and drops. We do the photos and the bull is winched into the truck, more food for many folks. Away we go, riding more heavily. There are herds of blesbok running and wart hogs trotting by and many oryx on all sides. And there, along the skyline, we see a cluster of giraffe and a parade of ostrich! The rains have given a soft greenish tint to the grasses and darkened the leaves of the trees and bushes, washing off the ever present red dust. The land is shining and the zero humidity air is perfect purity; visibility is infinite. At length Joof sees a possible trophy oryx bull and we begin the stalk, the order of which is always Joof, T. and L., in a line. Johnny and Gina wait in the truck. We follow the big tracks of the oryx through the red sands and soft grass, the mountains in the distance shining in the lowering light. We walk for quite a while, sometimes seeing a glimpse of the beautiful brown and white oryx, with his handsome clown's mask of white. He seems, finally, to have faded away and, as we slip quietly along the shoulder of a rocky hillside, Joof stops T. and says, there - on the skyline - a mountain zebra! He positions T. on the shooting sticks, while L. focuses on the hunter, being unable to see the zebra from where she is standing. T. says later that at first he cannot see that zebra and then, all at once it moves just a little and, like magic, there it is! T. takes his shot, Joof claps him on the back with glee and yells, great shot! Due to our small number, we have a small celebration, but a heartfelt one. Hartmann's mountain zebra is an exceptional trophy and can only be hunted in Namibia. There is a good population here, but they are extremely shy and elusive and hunters strive for years even to see them. T.'s is a big, solitary stallion, past prime and handsome. This species of zebra are distinguished by their beautiful black striping that extends down their legs and also by a large dewlap beneath their chin. They have hooves that have evolved for mountain navigation, having a non-skid pad or heel, which they use to grip the rocks of their high homes. T. is more than thrilled and the photos will no doubt prove it! Then, because the zebra was taken high in the rocky hills, Joof goes to get the truck and drive it to the kill. The agonized grinding and clashing gears sounds like a fatality, but that Toyota is 25 years in service, respected and pampered and it is equal to this and any task. Up it comes, over the rocks and brush and out comes the winching cable once again. L. climbs into a small abattoir, oryx and zebra, legs waving in the air and away to the lodge goes this odd vehicle, filled with flailing hooves, laughing people and a big yellow dog, massively pregnant, bouncing on the seat and laughing happily too!

Tonight we have a black mussel soup and fillet of oryx - T.'s first oryx - and it is simply marvelous, but we are assured that the zebra is the #1 delicacy and that we have a great treat awaiting us soon!

The conversation at dinner is always stimulating and lively and fun and we have to tear ourselves away from the table to assure ourselves of enough rest to welcome another busy day.

The night sounds here are soft and gentle - no hyenas, only odd, tiny insect and bird sounds. Our room is very large, with high ceilings. The shower is huge, a pie plate-sized head and feels like silk on our skin. We have

bouquets of white netting over our beds and oil lamps at night, with little battery lamps, shades made of ostrich egg shells on the tables. There are Marina's exquisite touches everywhere, small baskets and tiny vases, each with a beautiful feather or the quill of a porcupine, several inches long. We find snacks by our beds at night and, today, someone on the staff has had fun with our little ever-present mascot, The Nose Bear, dressing him in his safari hat and dark glasses and we find him waiting for us when we come in for lunch, on a chair, looking quite dashing indeed!

Joof tells a scary tale of a man who had raised a kudu from birth and each day would feed it little treats when it would greet him in the yard with a nuzzle. One morning the man was in ill humor and, when the kudu nuzzled him, he slapped it away. With one flick of its rapier-sharp horn, the kudu killed him instantly. A cautionary tale to all who forget that wild things are wild!

Friday, June 4th

We both sleep soundly and the sun bathes the distant mountains in warm rose tones in the early morning hours. We are brought coffee at 5:30am each morning and it is wonderful, rich dripped brew which starts our engines most effectively.

Our breakfasts are pleasant affairs and we are offered a wide choice. T. prefers bacon and eggs, L. loves cereal with fruit and one scrambled egg. We begin our days with energy and in comfort.

We leave shortly before 8am and drive off into a lovely morning, if a little too windy for hunter satisfaction. We have driven about 14 miles when Joof spots a very fine hartebeest at some distance. We begin a stalk through the soft grass in this beautiful place and suddenly Joof sets the sticks and T. sights and fires. Good shot! At 90 yards T. has shot a really exceptional red hartebeest, one of the most exotic animals in this area. He has a long, narrow face with some black masking and strange, backward-curving horns. This is an old male whose life is almost over and he is a handsome trophy. T. has hoped for one of these and he is thrilled. Once again the photos and videos reflect his joy.

After the hartebeest is loaded onto the truck we drive into the next ranch which Joof has owned for about 4 years, having bought it from a neighbor. We must open a gate and enter this area, which used to be a cattle ranch. The country here is more lush and there is an amazing variety of foliage - various acacias and thorn bushes and camphor bushes and others, providing wonderful forage for all kinds of animals. We drive to the new lodge, made of the rough, red stone of the area. It is elegant in a very different way, but here, too, Marina's fine hand is seen in the huge, magnificent planters and lovely arrangements of native plantings and iron bird figures. There is a huge area that floods in the rainy season, creating a very large lake. Joof tells us that the bird and animal life is stupendous then and even fish and frogs and turtles, burrowed into the mud now, emerge with the waters to thrive here. It is a grand and surprising place!

On the way back to the lodge we go to the school and the workshop and the compound where the staff live, all of which Joof has built, bringing comfort and education to the people of the area.

We meet the young school teacher and, later, she joins us for lunch - a wonderful stir-fry meal. She is bright and enthusiastic about her young pupils and, as she was raised on a farm, so she is comfortable here in the bush.

L. and Hanns-Louis meet for a computer session, installing MS Word on Joof's computer and L. shows him some useful tricks to help him in his computing life. They spend a solid hour happily involved - but the evening hunt is calling.

After coffee, Joof says, we will do the scenic mountain route this evening. We go into the high country above the lodge, running on a track between rocky cliffs where kudu bulls and their cows are feeding and onto soft open grasslands, greener than the lowlands, park-like and glorious beyond our dreams, serene and vast, with oryx and kudu, hartebeest and giraffe and a sunset to break our hearts, in every shade of rose and crimson, and gold.

As we return to the lodge for dinner we are welcomed effusively by Gina, who is now too pregnant to go on the truck, much to her despair, and by the two "dachels", Peanut and L.S. (which stands for Little S..., as she is a devilish little brat of a pup), who gently and firmly touch the tip of their noses to L.'s hand in greeting.

We have a little happy hour by the fire pit, L. trying both to work on the Journal and to enter into the conversation - her usual conflict! - and, Bob says that today, using the one of the knives that T. has given both him and

Joof, he killed a large spitting cobra on the main road. This certainly does get our attention! The thought lingers...

We have fillet of zebra tonight and it is superb, deserving of its exalted reputation!

Every camp or lodge or ranch or farm needs some practical magic and here the possessor of this gift is Bob, who, with his mechanic's background and natural skills can repair or construct anything as needed. He has a grand shop in the compound across the road and there he works his wizardry on all of the machinery and equipment of the camp and even on small things: one of the school children broke his glasses and Bob welded them back together!

Saturday, June 5th

L. has tummy troubles and elects to stay in the lodge today, writing cards, working on the Journal and resting. As she settles onto the balcony with coffee, yogurt and her computer, surrounded by dogs and breathing the pure, sweet air, Hans-Louis appears...an excuse to play with his Compaq laptop, which needs some house cleaning! A couple of very pleasant hours pass quickly, the Compaq is revitalized and then T. returns, with tales of a major Oryx, Joof says, a dream Oryx, which turned his tail to T. just before the shot, saving his own life - and also of another oryx, which T. attempted to cull for Joof. When T. tried to shoot him between two acacia trees, he drilled an acacia right through the center of the trunk! What will our taxidermist do with that?

The poor school teacher has had a bad fall from her bike. She stops by to display a huge purple shiner and to give L. a stone from her home farm, farther south in Namibia - a thoughtful gift!

We meet up for lunch in the outdoor dining room and then have a good nap. L. wakes refreshed but not inclined to hunt and so T. and Joof and Bob, with Johnny, go out after coffee and L. sinks into one of the big leather couches in the lounge to write. As Marina is taking Hans-Louis to the village of Omitara, to ride bikes with friends, L. goes along for the sights and is introduced to the common road hazard in this part of the world: kudu cows crossing the roads, just like the white tails at home!

Later, back in the lounge, she is buried under dachshunds and surrounded by Labradors and comforted by a cozy fire as she at last settles in to finish the cards and catch up on that Journal.

At about 5:30pm, L. is in the room, getting ready for dinner, when she hears the hunting vehicle. As she goes out onto the balcony, T. calls, come and see! There in the back of the truck is a major Oryx, huge horns sweeping down its back, enormous body filling the truck bed. T. has his wish! When they approached the area where they had seen the prize in the morning, Joof sent Johnny up a tall acacia, from which he could see a herd of Oryx. He spotted one who towered over all his herd mates and Joof said, that's him, let's go. Bob was along and he waited in the truck while T. and Joof & Johnny stalked with great care, avoiding the watchful eyes of the oryx cows, until they were within sight of the huge bull. His shoulders were above all the others and his body and horns were massive. Joof said, take him and set the sticks. T. made a perfect 160 meter shot, dropping him almost instantly. This is a real trophy animal and Joof and Johnny deployed marvelous tactics in finding him again and taking T. to him so efficiently. T. is thrilled and Joof proclaims that T. is the finest shot he has had as a client in 10 years and that it is great to be able to say, take him, and know that the shot is almost certainly going to go exactly where it should!

Dinner is festive, as befits a post-hunt meal. T. wears his red suspenders again, which are the sign - for him - of a successful hunt.

As we go to bed, we all express the hope that Gina's pups will arrive tonight. It is so hard for her to move and she obviously misses the hunts terribly.

Sunday, June 6th

This morning T. says he pursued oryx all night. After breakfast we head into the hills behind the ranch, the area that L. finds the most beautiful of all. We climb onto a small hill to survey the valley on the other side, broad grasslands with acacia trees and thorn shrubs and herds of eland and impala and kudu and oryx feeding and moving across it. The grasses on these higher plains are a mist-green and the same weeds that are sere and brown below are fresher here and small flowers are blooming. It is a world just slightly different from that on the other side of the ranch and it is a lovely contrast. We stalk an old oryx to cull, but he slips away. We drive along the base of the hills, red brown rocks and boulders in tumbled masses with unfamiliar striations, unlike the rocks of our home. The kudu watch us from the heights and there are some hyraxes, our friends from Table

Mountain in Cape Town! We stop for coffee at a water hole - bore holes are sunk and the water is piped to man-made troughs in the bush for the game to drink - and enjoy the shade of a terminalia tree. There are also wait-a-bit thorns - horrible bushes with spikes on top of the branch and hooks, going the other way, beneath. They are very difficult to get loose from and can be a painful encounter!

We stalk into the hills on foot and see signs of baboon and the huge hoof prints of giraffe. Joof says that those big hind feet can and do kick lions over the tops of trees when they attack from the rear! We love this place, with its soft colors and cool air. L. thinks she could live right up here, with few regrets for civilization.

There are some rock ferns up here - a woody stem, somewhat like our spleenworts - and a dusty purple flower that resembles a trumpet vine. L. collects some small stones and a piece of driftwood - these are the things that always make our luggage heavy on the return trip from anywhere!

There he is! Our little friend from Zimbabwe, the fork-tailed drongo, our Herd Bird! We are very happy to see one of those again.

We visit a porcupine "village" - a series of huge holes down which these big animals burrow. Joof finds two quills for L.'s collection - daunting great spikes! These are not like the smaller porkeys of the northern USA!

Lunch is curried chicken - wonderful! After a rest, we meet with a local artist of great skill and purchase some lovely embroidery pieces and a watercolor of two oryx for T. L. considers a kudu as well, which will be finished by the week's end.

There is a pair of yellow billed hornbills - those wonderful cartoonish birds - living in the little courtyard behind our room. They peck at the windows. L. takes photos - real character in those faces! Their voices are odd, their beaks huge and curving...fine, funny birds!

This afternoon Hanns-Louis accompanies us on the hunt. We go onto the grassy plains and oryx and kudu welcome us on all sides. We are looking now for blesbok and eland and springbok. Eventually we begin the stalk and at length Joof sights some blesbok beyond the trees. He settles T. on the sticks and then, with no warning, gives a mighty blast on the wounded-animal call that T. has given him! T. lurches and shoots low, hitting the blesbok nonetheless and the video camera in L's hands gives a jump! Then T. shoots again and has a beautiful old bull and Hanns-Louis joins our little victory dance tonight!
(We suggest that, if Joof must use that call to make an animal raise its head and present its horns for inspection, he should warn the hunter first!)

This evening's meal is in the kitchen, a cozy and pleasant room, and the staff is off, so Marina cooks kudu-burgers and home made rolls - just in case we, as Americans, are homesick for such food...MacKudu?

Monday, June 7th

T. has decided to pass up a springbok and instead take a good kudu, if one should present itself to him. An eland is far from assured, as we have seen few. This morning we start off into another area, the special kudu zone, Joof says. We are late getting started, as Gina has delivered a litter of puppies under a rock in the yard - all Sidewalk Specials, Joof says. They must be put down and everyone is sad. Once all that is arranged, we hunt, but the kudu tend to move early and late in the rut, which is on now. T. takes a jackal, perhaps saving another young animal. We walk for several hours as usual (we have each taken in our belts a notch already) and enjoy it as always, but the kudu are ahead of us. Now we do see a kudu, but he is a very old male with one horn broken off short. Joof suggests culling him, as this meat will be very welcome and he cannot compete any longer for the favors of the cows. T. takes a shot of about 90 yards and drops him with a perfect hit behind the shoulder. Joof proclaims that, while setting T. up for the shot, he thought, now I think I would hit him just - there!...and, as he watches, that is exactly where T's shot goes!

The hunt in the afternoon is a serious kudu search and before long we are seeing many. Then Joof stops the truck and we all begin to creep through the grass to hide behind a thorn bush. Joof and T. glass the area ahead for a long time and then motion to L. to keep Gina with her and wait. For about an hour L. sits quietly, with a very frustrated Labrador beneath a bush, as night falls and tiny finches begin to gather, filling the branches of the thorn bush with sleepy chirping.. Unlike Zimbabwe, here there is no sense of danger - even the poisonous snakes have gone dormant for the winter now, except for mid-day on very warm days - and she feels calm and curious, waiting to hear a shot, perhaps, or to see the hunters returning. Finally, against the sunset, Johnny trots into view and says that the kudu has eluded them and now we will take the truck to where

they are waiting. He and L. climb aboard, L. in the passenger seat this time and begin to drive straight across the bush, just avoiding huge warthog and porcupine holes and seeing, in the very dim light, a big porcupine lumbering off into the grass. After miles of bumping and bouncing and backing and filling they come to the road again and soon see T. & Joof standing and talking animatedly, reliving the kudu stalk.

Dinner this night is the best of all the wonderful meals so far: we have a spectacular soup of butternut squash, curry, orange juice and cream - a real success! We have fillet of oryx, vegetables, salad, potatoes and a local and exotic desert. Goodness! Good thing we walk hours a day!

Joof has shown us how to find the Southern Cross and here, at last, we are seeing the African skies in all of their majesty, as there are wide-open vistas and dry, clean air. We have read that Namibia is an astronomer's paradise, as the visibility is so exceptional and one can see stars of both the northern and southern hemispheres from some regions. Each night we stop on our way to the room and gaze in awe at skies so clear that the Milky Way again deserves its name and every tiniest star is on fire. The entire shape of the moon is visible, even when the moon is new. An occasional satellite crosses the sky, blinking distantly. The power and beauty of these moments together will surely stay with us forever.

Tuesday, June 8th

We have slept the perfect sleep and feel fine and today we will go to town, Windhoek, with Marina and Joof, for some shopping and lunch and just to change the scene. We leave after breakfast and drive into Windhoek in the very comfortable, newer, air-conditioned Toyota Land Cruiser - a luxury! We go straight to the finest craft shop for gifts and such - really a treasure trove. We find grand things for friends and family and for us - mementos for those days to come. L. and Marina stop into the South African Airways office to re-confirm next week's homeward flights and L. takes the opportunity to compliment the manager on the excellent care and service on the flight over, much improved over the flight in 1995. He seems quite stunned to be hearing such praise - probably most folks come in to fuss! We have lunch in a lovely little restaurant and then invade a grocery store to buy supplies for the ranch. This is a novelty for L., who loves markets in other countries and also a rare experience, seeing T. & Joof, masters of the bush and the hunt, bumping through the store in bewilderment, trying to help Marina with the shopping!

We are given a tour of the newer residential areas of Windhoek as well, high on the hills around the town. All in all, this small city is a clean, safe and pleasant place, with excellent shops and some fine homes. As Namibia has had independence from South Africa since March 21, 1990, there are many embassies and diplomatic residences here and some elegant touches indeed. It is a very satisfying and interesting day and a fun change for all.

On the way back to the lodge, T. & Joof are spotting kudu along the roads and making plans...

We are always greeted by swarming dogs when we return to the lodge. The little dachshunds yap and yammer and dance and swirl while the labs wag broadly and smile and bounce gently in place. Gina is gentle and soulful. Rex, the big, black male, is a slightly dim bulb, sweet and kind, a little hard of hearing, a thunderous snorer and supremely flatulent. One can always find Rex around the lodge, by the terrible sounds and by the hint of "something in the air"! L. says that he is the only dog she has ever known who really does say "woof"!

Joof and Marina are from South Africa but have been in Namibia for over 30 years. They speak Afrikaans as a first language and English and other languages fluently. They speak to the staff in Afrikaans (that language was originally developed as a slightly simplified household tongue, for communication between the Dutch settlers and their staff). When T. made his perfect shot in culling the broken horned kudu, Joof turned to Johnny and said, in Afrikaans, the man can shoot! Somehow, L. understood it perfectly and said, yes, the man can indeed shoot! Joof grinned and T. was happy and complimented.

Back at the lodge, a cup of hot tea revives L. magically and we admire our purchases and then go to the fire pit and then to dinner, very contentedly. We eat lightly, having had a fine lunch in town, but the starter, a superb oryx goulash soup, is a pleasure.

Marina says that a safari should be more than the hunting; it must also be comfort, fine wine, excellent food, romance, the proper ambiance! We agree enthusiastically - while across L.'s mind march images of remote camps, at tree line in the far north, with no running water (unless we ran with the bucket from the lake) a fridge cut into the permafrost, a tiny wood stove to heat icy lake water for washing in the morning, a kitchen tent with a big rough table for meals and the smell of deet and pine woods and wood smoke in the air. The northern

lights billowing curtains of lights sweeping across the skies and the silence as profound as on the earth's first day. And the Zimbabwe bush tent camp, with the hyenas' mad songs in the night and the dust and insects and those blazing red eyes in the headlights on the long, cold drive back to camp in the evening. Here, we revel in the hot showers, big thick towels, candle light at dinner and the superb South African wines that, as we do not drink, are enjoyed by Joof and Marina and Bob. We are endlessly delighted by little arrangements on tables and perfect plantings in the gardens. Instead of fish, caught fresh from an icy arctic lake or a wilderness river, we have wild game, T.'s own harvest, in all of its variety, transformed into gourmet fare. We have certainly been blessed by many wonderful places in all their infinite moods. Could we ever decide which we loved best, where we were the happiest?

In those remote camps, power was always supplied by a weary, abused but faithful and usually unflinching Honda generator and the distant humming roar was the background music of the camp. Here, the huge generator is petted and pampered, in the same prime condition as all of the equipment and it charges a bank of batteries. The hum is only occasional and the power is quite dependable, providing no one uses too many items that draw it down. There is a pristine meat room, where the game is properly butchered and made into the myriad of forms that we enjoy at meals, as well as the biltong that is beloved by all - a very hygienic and non-greasy style of that African staple. There is a gleaming laundry room, from which we gratefully receive our clean clothes each afternoon, warm from dryer and iron and Marina's sewing room, from which wonders emerge, curtains and pillow slips and clothes and tablecloths, to add beauty to this beautiful place. There are other rooms and areas of the big, rambling building and all is devoted to the smooth and efficient functioning of the whole. The family has their quarters on the 2nd floor of the main building, away from the guest quarters and everything flows in smooth lines and pleasing angles, room to room and wing to wing, forming a sanctuary in this otherwise natural wilderness.

Wednesday, June 9th

We hunt this morning for that kudu bull - in Afrikaans this sounds like kudebelle - and drive and walk over the miles. We see many young kudu, male and female and oryx and hartebeest, ostrich, duiker and big shrub hares. These are large and live above ground, unlike rabbits, which live in burrows. There is another, called a spring hare, inaccurately as it lives below the ground, which is hunted by the Bushmen in a fascinating way: they fasten the forked tip of an antler to a long pole and run this slowly down the spring hares' burrow. When they feel the soft body of the hare, they slowly turn the pole, winding up the elastic skin of the hare and, when it will turn no further, withdraw the pole, hare attached. They may spend a day by that burrow, winding up and pulling out a fine meal for their family.

We dress in dusky greens here, to blend with the greens of the bushes and trees - not the khaki safari kit that matches the dry browns and buffs of Zimbabwe. As we walk, the red dust of Namibia clings to our boots and our cuffs and coats the lens of the camera and our glasses and turns the yellow Labrador's coat red-brown. This morning Joof throws sticks into a water hole and Gina has a nice play-bath, doing what labs love best, retrieving!

Suricats, which we know as meercats, are residents here, little fuzzy statues sitting bolt upright on their burrows. This morning a line of them, running flat out, head to tail, a tiny high speed train, crosses right in front of us as we drive along the track!

Lunch today is spaghetti with a sauce of kudu - that animal is useful as well as beautiful and indeed, they are a grand sight, with their huge spiral horns and coats in shades of gray and tan, with lighter striping and spots. The bulls have a hump on their shoulder and a proud bearing and the cows are a little like the hinds of Scotland, the watchers, the eyes and ears of the herd and very pretty ladies they are too.

The evening hunt is one of chilling air as the south wind, the wind of winter in this latitude, has arrived and we take one of those long walks into the setting sun, but no kudu bulls reveal themselves. We drive the long dirt track to the newer lodge, to deliver supplies to the caretaker there and, on the long cold dash through the darkness back to the lodge, a huge kudu bull looms up at the side of the track and then turns to race away into the night. That, says Marina, was the Phantom Kudu, teasing T. into hunting again tomorrow!

A gift of this night is an eagle owl, the largest of all the owls here. He was sitting on a dead tree and when he lifted off his wingspan made us gasp! He dwarfs our great horned owls by a good margin. He takes large prey.

L. proclaims the hot shower tonight the Best Shower in the History of the World! T. lights a fire in the hearth and Marina sends in a cup of hot tea...life returns, slowly, to frozen nose, fingers, toes...

Chicken for dinner is a nice change and fresh gooseberry tart is a treat!

We have seen, just in this one day, an amazing cavalcade of creatures: springbok (pronking!), eland, blesbok, warthogs, oryx, ostrich, kudu, zebra (both Hartmann's and Burchell's), suricats, several species of falcon, a hoopoe, lilac breasted rollers, that amazing eagle owl, francolin (a grouse, that struggles into the air and waddles away, making wild whirring sounds), countless finches, many hornbills...this is the Garden of African Eden, a lively paradise, here on earth!

With the wealth of animal and bird life right here and given the long drive and the need to stay over in a Rest Camp there, we have canceled our plans to go to Etosha. It is a touristy animal viewing area, with spotlit water holes at night - not our thing. The main attraction at Etosha is elephant and we had been surrounded by those great beasts in Chewore - elephants almost in our pockets! We are very relieved not to have to pack and drive and interact with crowds of people, after the tranquillity of this place!

Thursday, June 10th

We get an early start this morning. Bushy (short for Bushman, the family name for the wonderful man in charge of the kitchen here) firmly believes that T. has taken no kudu because we leave at too relaxed an hour. Today we will eat at 6am instead of 7am and be in the bush soon thereafter. Since Bushy then must be in the kitchen even earlier, we cannot complain that it is easy for him to say that...!

The air is frigid this morning and we have layers of clothing on and can see our breath. We cross the main road outside of the ranch gates and head toward the dry riverbed. As it is in a valley the air becomes even colder. Johnny and Joof are spotting on all sides, looking for the kudu give away, the flash of light on those big spiral horns. And then we stop and begin a quiet stalk through the thornbush, slipping with as little sound as possible to within sight of a wonderful kudu bull. Joof had said that the bulls we had seen until now were "beginner kudu", not sufficient for T. Now he has found one that fills the bill and sets the sticks for T., who, puffing a bit from the fast, tense stalk, fires and misses cleanly. The bull is facing him, presenting a narrow target and the shot is over 300 yards. He is such a spectacular bull that, although T.'s better judgement tells him that it will not work, he just has to try! Undaunted, Johnny and Joof begin again to follow the tracks, very quickly now indeed, with T. & L. behind them... We all stay low and try to be quiet, as wait-a-bit thorns snag our clothes and the dry sand crunches under our boots. It is a brilliant stalk, utilizing the wind currents, the rising sunlight and the land. It is a flanking movement, worthy of Stonewall Jackson. Finally, Joof says, there he is! He sets the sticks. The range is something over 200 yards and he is poised broadside, ready to bolt. The sight picture is good and, at the shot, he drops in his tracks. L. has filmed the setup and the shot and now she captures Joof's great swat that rocks T. on his feet and the shouts of joy at a fine trophy, taken perfectly. We pace off the distance and find the bull in the grass, right at the edge of the road! T. says, well, I try to be helpful! Johnny has only to drive down the track and load animal into the truck. His smile is very broad as he pulls up and the videos and the stills are full of big grins and excited chatter. We toast this grand kudu with hot coffee and, at last, load him into the Toyota and drive to the animal shed, satisfied and pleased and perhaps a little relieved to be done with the hunting now. T. proclaims that Old Death Ray will be cleaned and put away until the trip home. Joof says, the gun is Old Death Ray but T. is Old Dead Eye! He states emphatically that the only client, in all of his years of guiding safaris, who shot better than T. was a 30 year old professional shooter, who culled kangaroos in Australia for a living. What a complement! T. is grateful and L. is proud.

T.'s delight is in the hunt, the stalk, the tactics. Joof says that some hunters want to drive up to an animal and shoot it, collect the trophy, be done with it. He is pleased with T.'s appreciation of the logistics and the effort and the hard, clever work that goes into a good, successful hunt.

The animal shed is near the school and so we visit the still-bruised young teacher and her young pupils, who sing 3 songs for us, dance a little and, all in all, are charming. L. films and T. sings a little song for them, complete with a soft-shoe dance and we go on our way, happy and thrilled with the morning.

Back at the lodge, L. has a proper shampoo and scrub and general renovation, as T. stretches out on the bed and relives his success. Gina comes in, settles onto the rug between the beds and falls asleep, dreaming with little wuffs and whimpers, perhaps reliving the kudu hunt as well.

Albe', the teacher, joins us for lunch and we then spend the rest of the day resting, reading - T. cleans Old Death Ray and puts him, with thanks, into the case. L. house cleans Marina's Toshiba laptop and cuddles dogs and just enjoys the indolence. We have a wonderful barbecued zebra filet for dinner, stand gazing at the Milky Way

for awhile and go to sleep at our usual early hour, very well pleased. The hunting part of this safari is over.

Friday, June 11th

This morning, as L. rests and orders the gear a little, T. and Joof, with Gina go off to a water hole to hunt sand grouse. Joof takes his beautiful Belgian Browning over and under 12-gauge shotgun. Joof had explained the sand grouse come into the water holes precisely between 8 and 9 in the morning and indeed they do. They come in 2's, 3's and larger numbers and Joof graciously offers the gun to T., explaining that normally an inexperienced client will kill 5 birds with 50 shells! After T. has fired approximately 10 shots, possibly winging one grouse, he is demoralized to the point of handing the gun to Joof for instruction. Joof proceeds to take high, low, medium, left, right and all and in short order the sky is raining sand grouse and Gina is retrieving merrily. He tops it all off with 2 doubles and, with this final flourish, the shooting is over for the morning. T. is left with the feeling that, if he had hurled a handful of dried peas at the birds, he would have accomplished as much. Fame is, indeed, fleeting...

As an alternative to the tourist hordes and spotlights of Etosha, we opt to join Joof and Marina and Hans-Louis at their holiday cottage in Swakopmund, on the western coast of the country. It is a drive of about 270 miles. We leave late in the morning, eat lunch in Windhoek and drive to the sea. As we go west, the landscape changes dramatically, showing us high and jagged mountains on the horizons and rapidly diminishing vegetation, sand, trees and brush giving way to sand and rocks and a few plants that cling, like our sagebrush or creosote bushes, to the dry dust. We are entering the realm of the Namib Desert, the oldest desert in the world, says Joof. It is narrow, a strip only a few miles deep, running along the West Coast of the country. It is a strange place; a desert of saturated sea mists, which sweep in from the west, morning and night and of relentless east winds that blast the land from the other direction, rolling the huge dunes toward the coast in massive, billowing balloons of red gold sand. This disparity has produced a place that teems with life and energy - unique in all the world. We have left the Kalahari camel thorn behind and entered a world of towering dunes and salt and sea. However, the little village of Swakopmund is bright and welcoming and we are happy to be there.

L is having more tummy trouble and retires early with a bowl of cereal. We go to sleep with the sound of the surf filling the little room.

Saturday, June 12th

This morning is warm - again, not seasonable. Have we brought this odd weather with us? We go into Swakopmund (Swakop is the name of the river, mund means the river's mouth). It is a bright, clean and shining seaside town, much like the little villages on the coast of Maine that we love. The people strolling the streets are relaxed and happy and there are elegant small shops. T. buys L. an exquisite little pair of gold earrings with tiny Bushman art figures on them - a sweet souvenir of this delightful place. We return to the cottage for lunch and Marina has prepared a grand Caesar salad with fresh bread and, especially for T., hot fudge sundaes for dessert! L. and Marina and Hans-Louis surf the web on Marina's laptop for a while and then L., at T.'s insistence, goes up to nap, as her innards are still in revolt. After an hour's nap and a long hot shower, she is much improved and we joined by a friend of the Lamprechts for dinner at The Tug, a fine local restaurant that is fashioned from the shell of an old coastal tugboat. There we have the delicacy that we so loved in Cape Town, the Rock Lobster! It is wonderful to have it again...

The cottage is very old and Joof and Marina have renovated it in the original style, the German holiday cottage of the early settlers, although this one boasted a tower for watching the sea and an Italian-style interior... It sits directly on the beach, part of a little row of cottages built there. It is very special and beloved of the family and their friends and they always come here at Christmas, which is in the hottest month here in the southern latitudes. We soon understand why they all love it so much.

We go to sleep to the surf's song again and rest well.

Sunday, June 13th

In the morning, L. stands looking west, over the ocean. At home, we look east across the sea. Is she looking at our Maryland shore from here? No! At this latitude she is looking at Patagonia!

On the steps up to the little guest suite, there are two grasshoppers the size of small planes! The little household maid tosses one into the air and it sails away down the road, looking like an enormous bird, visible for blocks! L. and the maid shudder just a little...

Breakfast is at a grand, traditional German coffeehouse, elegant and attractive. While we are eating, a won-

derful vision materializes outside the window: a huge Mercedes truck, on the order of a Hummer but larger, towering, tan and terrible, with lots of camping gear in and on it. Bustling around it is a little, round man in dusty khaki, small round glasses on his nose, eccentricity writ large. L. goes out to meet him and photograph him with his vehicle, reducing him to happy giggles and shuffles.

Joof takes L. & T., along with Hanns-Louis, on a tour of this very interesting area. We drive into the Moonscape, a rather threatening, eerie space, blasted by winds and sun, with glowering cliffs and black lichens that, when Joof pours bottled water on them, magically open and turn bright green! We gladly leave this inhospitable place and go down the coast to see the salt mines, which draw salt from the sea. The men dry it on flats and truck it to sieves, which screen out the sand, producing high white mountains of salt (Namibian Snow, says Hanns-Louis). All along the coast are feeding hundreds upon hundreds of flamingos, along with pelicans and many small wading birds, a lovely assortment of indigenous life. To see the flamingos, both lesser and greater, feeding upside-down, stalking on their bright pink stilts, is delightful. We drive onto the great dunes, famous for their amazing ability to "walk" over the land, wandering vast distances, moved by the fierce winds. They are beautiful, swelling and silky soft, golden brown and shadowed by the sun. We get out and walk and slide and climb on them, photographing and appreciating them, falling in love with them. They will certainly remain in our dreams - they are wonderful. L. uncovers a little fat black beetle, who begins at once to dig into the sand again, tiny legs flying, sand spraying behind him. Within seconds he is gone! We stop at the local aquarium to see, at close hand, some of the local sea life and, in an open pool, L. and Hanns-Louis touch the Rock Lobsters - scaly antennae waving in the water. This has been a fascinating morning tour!

Back at the cottage, Marina has been baking, filling the house with wonderful aromas. We drink ice water and nibble samples of her craft and catch up on the CNN news and generally relax for a while.

Marina returns from shopping with a gift for L.: an exquisite little pewter spoon, made by a Namibian artisan, with the handle in the shape of a branch. At the tip is a perfect and beautiful little chameleon, a memento of L.'s little friend. This will have a special and treasured place in our collection and our hearts.

Lunch is a buffet at the fine local hotel and then, after an hour's rest, we pack the vehicle and head back to Windhoek and then to the ranch. Marina will stay at the town house tonight to take care of matters in town. After dropping her there, we go on to the ranch and, after a later than usual dinner, Bob Hanns-Louis, Joof, T. & L., we turn in. This has been a unique and delightful weekend in a whole new part of the world.

Monday, June 14th

Packing and relaxing day...last day at the lodge. Out come those duffels from the other bedroom and down come the clothes from the big wardrobe. L. tries to discard some of her larger stones and make some sense of the little stacks of scattered gear. Carolla and Kurt, the German artist and her husband, join us for lunch, bringing two watercolors that L. has purchased - one of oryx and another of a kudu bull...this last one prophetic, ordered before T. had decided to hunt kudu!

On the walkway from our room to the main lodge, wandering along in the sunshine, long silky tresses blowing gently in the afternoon breeze, a new and rather startling example of Africa's more exotic fauna: a hairy worm! This bizarre character is about 5 inches long and is covered from one end to the other in soft gray brown hair, at least two inches in length. This hair is actually irritating to the touch, so L. takes its picture with her close-up lens but does not try to handle it and off it goes, unmolested and unconcerned.

The little dachels are never still. They trot purposefully around the lodge, the grounds, the guest rooms, on very important errands known only to themselves. Peanut, the mother dog, is clearly in charge here. After her litter was born she cared for them for two days and then turned them all over to Gina, who, nursing her own litter at the time, simply added them to the family. L.S., the devilish daughter, is a kinetic little shadow of her mummy, always in motion, alighting suddenly and briefly in L.'s lap for a snuggle, dashing away again in a flash. Peanut lingers; she and L. are bonding, sharing long cuddles at odd moments.

After lunch, we settle up with Joof and have a companionable coffee together. L. goes with him to help with some printer problems and in his office beholds an amazing object, the computer that Joof refers to as "wood burning", an ancient DOS box, labeled ELF, with a tiny screen and with a menu overlaid on DOS 1.01 and zipping along merrily, having so little loaded onto it. Joof uses it for all of his office records and correspondence. He says that a nerd-friend set it up for him about 20 years ago, installing good, simple word processor, spreadsheet, etc. and the little black screen with orange letters glows pleasantly, evoking memories of L.'s first computer. It sits near the new, powerful Toshiba laptop...two sides of the computing coin - each excellent in its way!

We have our last dinner together tonight. We are almost all packed now and we are starting to have that temporary sensation, caught between the wonderful idyll here and the reality of our home so far away. Bed is welcome and our little nightly ritual, a fire on the hearth and an oil lamp glowing on the bedside table is enjoyed one final time.

Tuesday, June 15th

At breakfast, Joof announces that, as he awakened early, he spent the time "...computing, as you say"! L. is tickled, having nudged him over that fine line into an appreciation of his new Toshiba tool. He has now formatted a page and printed an envelope and is well on the way to new horizons!

We sit on our little balcony, enjoying the cool, sweet air. This is likely not the temperature that awaits us at home! L. puts some finishing touches on the Journal and T. reads. Joof has given L. a black crystal, which she suspects is magic and a "snakebite stone", which is purported to draw the poison from a wound. She wets the tip of a finger and places the curved surface of the stone on it...and it dries at once! That surely is also magic!

Joof is a professional hunter of tremendous skill and expertise and has planned and developed his operation and his life with a brilliant combination of common sense and good fortune. Marina is a warm and charming woman with great talents and creative gifts. Theirs is an affectionate and effective union and they love and treasure their children and their friends. They have played an active and important role in the developing independence of their beloved country and in the conservation and care of the unique and precious habitat and inhabitants of this area. We are most fortunate to have been so graciously included in their world.

Goodbye to all the dogs, to the lodge and to this lovely land. Joof and Marina drive us to the airport, shepherd us expertly through the check-in and, with hugs and farewells, we leave them and Namibia behind.

The flight home is cramped, long and unmemorable - but a necessary step back to the life we love and that we left two weeks ago - two weeks that seem much longer!

We have had another wonderful African adventure. All but one of L.'s wishes have come true, as she has seen a chameleon and giraffe and she has seen the desert bloom, with only the cheetah eluding her. She has found a new magic here, in the subtle and surprising world of the camel thorn Kalahari. T. has taken exceptional trophies with great style and skill, pleasing himself and his Professional Hunter. All of our training and preparations paid off, as we had the gear we needed and had no difficulty with the hiking. We have lost inches and pounds and gained new knowledge and memories - a good exchange! We have shared many wonders, made fond friends and found a lovely new part of the world. Perhaps T.'s son would enjoy it here? And how about his grandson....?

At home, L. places the black crystal and the snakebite stone on her desk...

Planning begins.

Linda Worthington
June 16, 1999