



Farm News from January

January treated the farm to a range of temperatures from -28 C to above freezing. Or so I heard because I was not there.

On January 1st I boarded a plane to start the journey I had only dreamed about. Africa! With the farm left under the capable supervision of my daughter along with the super help from the visiting WWOOFers from Germany and my son, this was my chance.

Why Africa? I had traveled to other countries over the years but there was something missing that I really longed for - adventure! I found it here, and more.

My son had visited Uganda and made many friends. He said "you've got to go, you'll love it". When I contacted his friend Atayo in Kabale, western Uganda, he invited me to stay in his home. I also learned about the work Atayo and his friend Alphonse were doing at a local school.

Amatsiko School is a private school, funded mostly by donation. There are 120 students ranging from 3 - 11 years. Most are either orphans, HIV+ or vulnerable children from the streets. The school feeds them 3 meals a day since many have no food where they are boarded. Meals consist of mostly ground corn served as porridge. My eyes were opened but with tears.

Rather than just being another tourist supporting hotels and visiting gorillas, I saw new priorities. It started with building some raised beds and planting gardens: cabbage, green peppers and spinach. 10 beds in total, hopefully enough to provide extra nourishment throughout the school year. Then there were the vertical gardens, simple solutions for families with little space for gardens. The project was located right beside a high traffic area where many eyes could see. Two bags recycled from sugar were sewn together and

filled with soil. Stones in the middle provided a pathway for watering. Holes were then poked into the sides of the bags and spinach planted.

Then there was a new priority. The Education Department notified the school that their school would be shut down due to inadequate toilet facilities. They were using a hut made from mud and sticks with a hole on the unstable floor. With homemade bricks worth a couple pennies apiece, a new toilet was now being built.

Then there was another problem. All water for the garden had to be carried by hand from the next-door neighbour who was more interested in money than he was in helping. That neighbour rented the land to the school, boarded some of the children and also sold them water. Now with dry gardens needing water there would be more income. That bothered me so the next project was to purchase a 2200 litre water tank and gutters for the roof. Not only would the garden grow but the school would use the rain water for cooking, cleaning and washing hands. My friend donated \$200 that was enough to build a new classroom. That donation would allow the 11 year old kids to return for another year of school now that they had a room, dirt floors only.

Another project was building rabbit pens. Protein is so badly needed, especially for pregnant moms. Each pen had 4 rooms and once the rabbits reproduced, the owners had to give 2 rabbits to a neighbour and so on. 3 pens were built, 2 were given to widows.

Over the years I've had so much volunteer help from the many people who stayed on our farm. Now it was time to give something back. If you've followed the "Farm News" you know that I also have an interest in wildlife. Read on:



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Uganda is located along the equator. I had expected hot sweaty weather but was presently surprised. Warm days, cool nights, T-shirt weather with a second layer for the evenings. Most amazingly - no bugs!

I met Lillian on the first day. She works as safari guide and is the mother of 5 adopted children. Her bubbling personality and dedication to wildlife conservation convinced me that I should see what she was talking about.

Our safari took us to Queen Elizabeth National Park. Within minutes we were seeing hundreds of Kob, a type of antelope. The wart hogs also caught my amazed attention. Being a pig farmer I was intrigued to see their ancient ancestors.

We could tell something was happening up ahead because several safari vehicles were stopped. Lions! Off in the distance through the tall grass we could see an occasional head popping up. We watched for at least an hour and when the other vehicles pulled away Lillian said, "just be patient". She knew her stuff. One by one the giant cats got up and walked towards us and crossed right in front of our vehicle, then climbed a tree beside us to rest. OMG!

After awhile the Kob and Warthogs were too numerous to count. Then what blew me away was a herd of elephants wandering out from the bush, bulls, cows and calves, right behind our vehicle. I heard the classic elephant shriek, then Lillian drove away. But why? She said that sound meant the mothers were alarmed at our presence and were likely to charge. Then I was glad she moved since the elephants towered over our humble van.

Lunch was outside in a little village inside the park. The storks would wander up to the tables looking for handouts. An 'ugly bird'

the others exclaimed but I am a turkey farmer so they looked OK to me. No sign of any new babies being delivered. I wish I could question my Mom on that one.

We hopped into a river boat and toured the banks of the Kazinga Channel, the world's largest channel linking two great lakes. In no time we were seeing water buffalo and hippos bathing along the shores. Hippos are HUGE and are the most dangerous animals in Africa. When they opened their mouths I could see why. Numerous crocodiles lined the banks, waiting. No swimming for me.

The birds! Colours that go beyond names and so many! Included was the Crested Crane, Uganda's national bird. Another was the Hammer Kop which builds the world's largest nest. We were told the nests have a front and back entrance with more than one room.

The ride home exposed even more elephants. We visited crater lakes, tea plantations, hot springs, brick kilns and so much more.

It is hard to describe the impact this trip had on me. The people were so friendly with smiles wherever I looked. Poverty? For sure but the Ugandans were the healthiest looking people I've met, perfect teeth with lean, hard bodies. Food grows everywhere with farmers making 85% of the population.

Lillian's fee? She charged us \$20 US apiece per day (plus park fees, etc). She started as a guide and since has become a great friend, like so many others we met in Uganda.

My son was right, "you'll love it!" When asked "how was your trip?" I just say 10/10. Soon I hope to link you to a video of our school projects. Next month and for many more months, there'll be more news but it will all be from back on the farm until hopefully, the next adventure calls.