

1997 NOT SO WILD SOUTH AFRICA

Monday, October 13, 1997. The flight from Atlanta to JFK was full of people all headed for foreign destinations. I had just finished introducing myself to the businessman on the end of our bank of three, who was on his way to Tblitsi and a walnut processing venture, when a young woman sat down between us who was on her way home to Connecticut from a 4-day Carnival Cruise. She didn't quite comprehend where the two of us were going! Kennedy was its usual unpleasant self. No one could tell me where to get the bus, and when I found it, the ride from Terminal 2 to Terminal 8 was slow and crowded. At last Mary and I connected in the Admiral's Club at American Airlines.

Tuesday, October 14. South African Airways was very pleasant, and since I was in first class was able to sleep much of the way under my duvet, or comforter. They even made up the seats with sheets so you almost thought you were in a bed! The flight from New York to Johannesburg is 14 and a half- hours but we were 40 minutes early arriving. And then we had to wait since Marc Kupper, the Travcoa tour manager, had been told we were coming in 40 minutes later!

Marc is the escort who took us to Tibet last year and I requested him from Travcoa. There were 8 of us, on the flight. Bob Weisman from Chicago, on their first Travcoa tour, and Joan and Marshall Ross from Savannah, on their second. There were also two ladies, Gretchen Chell from Florida and Nellie Turner, from St Joseph, Missouri. South Africa is 6 hours ahead of New York and will be seven hours when we go home since daylight savings is coming to an end. As soon as we got to the Park Hyatt hotel in the Rosehill suburb of Johannesburg, Mary and I had Swedish massages and felt much better.

South Africa is quite unlike the other parts of Africa that I have seen. It feels very westernized, with high-rise buildings and so forth. South Africa was settled by many tribes, the Zulus being the largest, others were the Bushmen and Hottentots. Then, in 1652, the Dutch and the Dutch East India Company settled in the Cape Town area. The

British came at the end of the nineteenth century. Today 70% of the population is black, 5% white and the rest are colored (mixed breeds) or Indian. The descendants of the Dutch are the Afrikaners who have a distinct language, although they all speak English as well. There are many native dialects as well. In the 1890s there were two Boer wars where the English did battle with the Dutch to conquer the country, and they finally did so in 1902.

During Apartheid, the blacks and colored were kept separated from the whites. Now that is gone, but the predominate faces on the street are white. The blacks have crowded into the cities but since there is no employment they have settled in shacks in squatter villages.

Johannesburg was settled in 1886 because gold was discovered in the area. It is a sprawling town today on the high veldt at 6000 feet above sea level, with most people living and working in the suburbs. Downtown has been left to the poor and has a very high crime rate, brought on, no doubt, by the fact that there is a 40% unemployment rate among the blacks. We are warned not to venture too far afield and carry nothing of value on the street. The government is trying to develop an economic structure and is educating the population but mandatory schooling only reaches through the sixth grade.

Wednesday, October 15. The tour convenes at 8:30 and we finally get to see our travel mates. There are 16 of us, including Marc with two more to come tomorrow. Charlie Berman suffers from muscular dystrophy but has a good spirit and seems more of a problem for Marc than the rest of us. Jean Atherton and Betty Crabtree are from

Florida and chain smokers (not allowed on the bus), but because they are constantly smoking off the bus we have little to do with them. Saul and Rita Barr are from Long Island. John and Lois Klaas are from San Diego, and while the oldest in the group, probably the healthiest and walk miles each day. So we are an assortment, but everyone seems pleasant enough.

We drove north about an hour through Pretoria to Cullinan to visit the diamond mine. Here the Cullinan diamond was found, the largest in the world. Its four largest pieces belong to the royal family of England being in the scepter and crown. The tour takes us, in hard hats, into the surface part of the mine where various exhibits show us what is going on below the surface. Originally a deep pit was dug which they surfaced mined. Now tunnels are cut in from below and the ore brought up in a large elevator to be crushed so the diamonds can be extracted. Diamonds are found in the magma core from ancient volcanoes in a rock called kimberlite. After the crusher has extracted the diamonds, the kimberlite is discarded, as it has no other use. Only

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a small portion of the diamonds is gem quality. Much of the mine production is used for industrial purposes. The DeBeers family owns the mines in South Africa and controls their distribution.

Then it was back to Pretoria for lunch at a lovely restaurant called Gerard Maerdykds. We had a taste of several South African delicacies. Pretoria, at 5000 feet of altitude, is known for its jacaranda trees and they all bloom in October so the city is full of their soft violet color. Pretoria is the capital of the Transvaal area and the administrative capital of the Union of South Africa and all the embassies are here. We stop at the imposing Union office building and peek into Nelson Mandela's quarters, where we see a lovely private courtyard. Nearby is a park with gardens of roses and other flowers. Monuments to war dead and national heroes are also pointed out.

President Krueger's house is furnished with turn-of-the-century furniture and in the buildings in back can be seen a replica of the house he died in back in Switzerland, where he fled when the British moved in. He was president of the Transvaal and wanted to stay independent of England. Many gifts were sent from all over the world to help him but were not the real help the nation needed to stay independent. In 1902 South Africa fell into England's hands.

We returned to Johannesburg and in the evening have a cocktail party and a talk by Bernadine, who is a member of the chamber of commerce. She talked about the problems since the end of apartheid. Corruption is rampant, 40% unemployment, and much crime.

The Rosehill Park Hyatt has a dining room with a strange menu. Everything is gussied up and serves somewhat average hotel food, with slow service. Marc tells us the slow service is typical for South Africa.

Thursday, October 16. Up early for a 7:00AM departure back to Pretoria. It is cold and blustery, say 45 degrees, and it is spitting rain. Mary points out that we should be staying in Pretoria since it is an hour from Johannesburg and we go there every day!

A half hour from Pretoria is the DeWildt cheetah research station. Here they have been able to breed cheetahs in captivity saving them from the endangered list. They also have brought the king cheetah back from extinction by determining that their bold stripes were caused by a recessive gene. The original cheetah-breeding program has grown to include other endangered species such as the wild dogs, one of the three most endangered species of South Africa.

After a walk where we viewed cheetahs, owls and vultures in their habitats, we were loaded on a big 4-wheel drive truck and driven through the rest of the reserve stopping periodically to feed the hyenas, impala and more cheetahs. They are fed either chickens or horsemeat, both of which, we are assured, are from older animals that were about to die. For a while the center fed the cheetahs a richer diet but they found they were losing their coats and had high cholesterol counts. The leaner diet of horsemeat and chickens has cured this. After the animals age a bit they are reintroduced into the wild at the various game parks and others find their way to the better zoos around the world. Since this is a private enterprise they survive on private donations from various corporations and from the sales of the animals. It was all very interesting but very cold.

Back to Pretoria we are taken to a great buffet lunch at the Karos Manhattan Hotel. Every conceivable kind of food was available from stir-fry to calamari. It was a nice change to pick and choose.

After lunch we drove back through Johannesburg to Gold Reef City a touristy amusement park built around an old gold mine. The interesting part is that we are taken on a trip 650 feet below the surface to tour an old mine shaft and afterwards we are treated to a gold pour where they take the gold dust and fire it into a gold bar worth, at today's prices, over 100,000 dollars. The skyscrapers of Johannesburg are pointed out as we drive back to the Park Hyatt at Rosehill, but security keeps us from seeing more of the city.

Our plan had been to go to a friend's recommended restaurant for dinner but we are tired and decide to try and see if there is something closer in the large mall, which adjoins the hotel. In our exploration we find a wonderful art gallery. Of course I had to fall in love with a verdite sculpture of a warthog and after much soul searching decide it has to be sent to Atlanta. Verdite is a greenish stone native to South Africa, which has rose colored mottling in it. The wart hog is scratching himself behind the ear. By this time it is really late but we find a nice Greek restaurant, the Paros Taverna, and are served delicious king sized prawns.

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Friday, October 17. Another early arousal, for we must drive the hour back to Pretoria to catch the Blue Train at 8:30. This 1000-mile train ride is famous and is done in special luxury cars. Our suite boasts everything from a cell phone and TV to beautiful wood paneling. On the TV is a continuous camera presentation of what is ahead of us on the track. Mary and I have a time learning to operate the doors. I become a specialist in the marble bathroom (complete with shower) door and Mary is the expert in how to open the door to the corridor. We settled down to what I had expected to be great scenery but which turned out to be very monotonous and flat. The Karroo Desert is semi-desert grassland and stretches as far as you can see. After a gourmet lunch in the diner, we requested our beds be made up and both of us settled down to a two-hour nap before tea. The rocking of the train makes us so sleepy, or maybe it is the fact we got up at 6:00!

At five, the train stops at Kimberley for almost two hours and a bus takes us to view the "hole", the largest man-made hole in the world.

Next to it is a "panning area" and we are given a bucket of gravel and invited to look for diamonds. All I got was dirty hands but some people in the group found small diamonds, obviously seeded for the tourists. Then we toured the museum area where a number of restored buildings depict every aspect of life in the turn-of-the-century town when the mine was at its peak. Banks, shops, a mortuary, and so forth are all set up to view. Then it was a tram ride back to the bus and the train.

Dinner was very elegant and delicious and we fall back into bed to sleep fitfully through the night. Unfortunately our closet door keeps coming open, flooding the room with light.

Saturday, October 18. We wake to find the scenery greatly improved with low hills around us. We pass a huge ostrich farm and then the train dove into a long tunnel through the mountain and on the other side we find vastly different mountainous scenery with valleys full of vineyards. We have breakfast with Art and Barbara Vitarius, who joined the tour late, and have a stimulating conversation on computers. He is the retired president of Johnson and Johnson. She is very involved with the schools in their area. We are due in Cape Town at noon.

We are met at the station by Ian our local guide, and taken to the Mount Nelson Hotel, a lovely hotel in the grand manner with attentive service. It is painted a distinctive pink color. Our room is lovely but I do not linger, grab a sandwich in the lounge and go to have a much-needed hair shampoo. The hotel in Johannesburg did not boast a beauty parlor.

The afternoon tour at 2:30 wanted to start by having us take a cable car to the top of Table Mountain, but it was too breezy, so after a brief photo op stop where the cable car begins, we set off for our city tour. There is a much different feel to this city than to Johannesburg.

Started by the Dutch in 1652, it came into British hands after the Boer Wars at the end of the 19th century. The British wanted the colony because of the gold discovered near Johannesburg. Table Mountain with Lions Head at one side form a spectacular bowl-shaped harbor for Cape Town, the result of an uplift when the Antarctic and African tectonic plates separated. It is all very beautiful with flowers everywhere.

We stop at the Castle of Good Hope, the original five-sided fort with its two small museums, one on the military and the other with its collection of furniture and export Chinese pottery. Then we walked through the 100-year old botanical gardens, established by Cecil Rhodes with trees from all over the world. En route we passed the parliament buildings for this is the legislative capital of South Africa and saw the house where Mandela stays when he is in residence. It was very hot, and when we reach the interesting natural history museum we find it un-air-conditioned. Fortunately we are late and only have a half hour to see the exhibits. Interesting dioramas of how the primitive people lived, much pottery and beadwork, and then a huge whale skeleton. If it cools off, it might be interesting to return here on our free day on Monday.

In the evening we took Mary's friends, Kevin Gramm and Brenda Bussell, out for dinner. We went to the wharf area, which has a shopping center, restaurants and entertainment around the original port of Capetown. Mortons was a New Orleans style restaurant since Kevin wanted a good old American steak, but very nice food.

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Sunday, October 19. Cecil Rhodes (1853-1902) came to South Africa as a young and sickly young man. He has a dream of Africa being all British. He discovered diamonds at Kimberley and became a rich man. Rhodesia was named for him and the Rhodes Scholarships are funded from the foundation established at his death. He was a governor of the province. Our first stop is at the Rhodes Monument, which has a commanding view of the city of Capetown and the peninsula. Kirstenbosch botanical Gardens is a beautiful garden and Ian points out the many species of proteas and the captans, which are interesting dwarf palm sort of plants with huge acorn-like seeds that dates from prehistoric times. The Capetown flower kingdom has the most varieties of any place on earth.

The Groot Constantia is a wonderful example of Cape Town Dutch colonial architecture, built by one of the early governors. A low white painted building with small paned windows with green shutters, and above the door an elaborate carving. The house is furnished in antiques and in the old winery beyond, there is a small museum of wine making. Although the estate still produces wine, we are not apparently going to try some.

Driving down the coast we sight a whale south of the beaches of Fishhoek. The beaches on the east side of the peninsula are very popular since the water is warmer than on the west coast. Our goal is Simons Town and below it a small penguin colony, the jackass penguin, which is only found in South Africa, so called because of the noise he makes when he returns from his daily fishing. There are about 800 in this rookery today. They first came here in 1985, and started nesting in the mangroves. The people who used to live near their beach are not too happy about it and one rather nice house has been deserted for the penguins that have overrun the yard.

The tip end of Africa is a botanical National Park, and although there are supposed to be baboons and some antelope there we were not lucky enough to see them. We had lunch at the Two Ocean

Restaurant at Cape Point, where I tried the famous king point, a delicious fish. While we ate lunch the fog rolled in and so after lunch I declined the ride in the funicular up to the lighthouse. In olden times, in the fog, some ships turned north too soon giving the name "false Bay" to the eastern side of the peninsula. Driving back into Cape Town along the Corniche road on the western or Atlantic side, the persistent fog disappointed us, but we did stop on more than one occasion to watch the whales at play, along the Misty Cliffs area.

Dinner that night was in the hotel dining room. The service was slow although the dinner was good.

Monday, October 20, 1997. Finally a day at leisure! Mary and I caught a cab to the Wharf and some shopping. Found a lovely gold bracelet in the Bushman style with cutouts of their cliff paintings as a souvenir for Mary. After a brief return to the hotel we caught another cab to Green Market square and the flea market there.

There wasn't much to appeal to us, but we window-shopped the surrounding antique shops and then walked back to the hotel. One stop was at an Internet cafe, where Mary hoped to be able to access her e-mail, which has been impossible up till now, but the cafe was also unable to access CompuServe. So we are out-of-touch.

That night we went to the Leinster Hall Restaurant on the street behind the hotel. Located in a one-time elegant house, the food and service were wonderful. We are lucky enough to share a table with Marshall and Joan and John and Lois, two of the more congenial couples on the tour.

Tuesday, October 21. Rainy day. We are obviously not going to get to take the tram ride to the top of Tabletop Mountain, though Ian keeps promising to keep trying, as it is one of the major things to do in Capetown. We set out for Stellenbosch but shortly after the bus breaks down and they have to send a replacement. Ian, our guide, entertains us with facts about South Africa. In Stellenbosch, which was founded in 1685 by the Dutch and retains much of its Dutch colonial flavor, we go to the botanical garden of the University of Stellenbosch, where the very entertaining curator, Dr

W. J. Tijmens tells of the research being done there. He introduces us to buchu brandy, which is said to cure everything, and to the wejwitschia plant, which comes from the Namibia desert and is over a thousand years old. There are bonsai and a greenhouse of of many species of pelagonia (geraniums).

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Then we went to Spier and to a winery for a tasting. The pinotage (half pinot noir, half hermitage grapes) was the best and we acquired a couple of bottles to take home. The pinotage is only made in South

Africa. We had a big buffet lunch at the winery.

Back in town, we toured the local Stellenbosch Village Museum. Four well-restored and furnished houses depict various periods in Stellenbosch history, the oldest dating from 1709, the most recent dating from the 1890s. The walk back to the bus took us past various boutiques and stores and Mary found an Internet cafe and tried again to access America on Line, but again without success. The weather is gradually clearing and we can see that we are in a valley with mountains on each side.

We drove to Paarl, which is under a big rock mountain that looks like a pearl when the sunlight hits it, and checked into the 5-star Grande Roche Hotel. Paarl means pearl in Africans. Our duplex is in the original slave quarters but the slaves never lived like this. On the first floor we have a huge living room and lavatory. Upstairs under the thatched roof is a huge bedroom and bath. The staff seems to outnumber the guests and it is all very luxurious. The attached restaurant "Bosman's" is one of the finest restaurants in the country.

We made the mistake of dining with Bob and Ann, who are always complaining of something, and Saul and Rita who wish we could just have a sandwich and Charlie, whose conversation mostly deals with his difficulties in coping with eating and bathrooms on the trip. Mary and I somewhat ignored them and enjoyed the wonderful food and the recommended wines. The others had had enough wine at the wine tasting. I really don't understand why Ann and Bob picked this tour. It is obvious they didn't read the brochure. We keep hearing how Tauck Tours would do it differently (like keeping us busy all the time and not wasting our time on all the luxurious lodging and dining!). I don't think Tauck comes to South Africa!

October 22, 1997. We get to sleep in since our tour doesn't begin until 10:00. (Bob and Ann will have to kill two hours on their own!). We ate our buffet breakfast on the terrace overlooking the lovely and fragrant rose garden with the mountains in the mist beyond.

We go to Nederberg Winery, one of the largest vintners in South Africa and have a tasting in the elegant drawing room of the manor house dating from 1792. The wines were not too impressive.

Then we went to the Boschendal Restaurant near Franschoek for another buffet lunch. French Huguenots who were brought over by the Dutch because of their grape growing ability settled this area. The complex included a lovely manor house with a long and fragrant rose garden behind.

In Franschoek there was a memorial to the Huguenots and an interesting museum that lists many of those that came. Various models give a picture of what the voyage must have been like. Then we had shopping time before being taken to see the monument to the Afrikaans language, high in the mountains. A long spire pointing at heaven represents the language is growing while the smaller hollow spire nearby represents that the language is open to outside influence.

Mary and I had a quiet and luxurious dinner, just the two of us, in the gourmet restaurant before heading to bed.

Thursday, October 23. We drove the same beautiful mountains that the train came through on the way to Cape Town seeing wild baboons en route. First stop was at the Kleinplasië Living Open Air Museum in

Worcester, where people demonstrated how they used to roast coffee and make soap.

Then we took a divergence to Montegu and the Montegu museum, the 130-year-old Joubert house that was painstakingly restored by the curator with almost no money. The kitchen has a unique floor of peach pits set in cement. The museum is more interesting for its herb garden from which numerous medicines are made. The main object of the museum is to preserve the medicines of the past.

Lunch was in Swellendam at the Zanddrift restaurant, where the proprietress, Edwina, prepares a menu for you. We had a hearty vegetable soup followed by a platter of pork, beef, tongue and corned beef in a special sauce, with a tossed salad. I didn't try the desert.

It's a long drive across rolling semi desert to where we can see the Indian Ocean. About five we stopped at Mossel Bay for a much-needed pit stop, but the shell museum was closed and finally we went on to George where we will stay two nights at the Fancourt golf resort.

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Friday October 24. Our hour-long drive took us up over spectacular mountains to the Little Karroo, a high arid plain where the main production seems to be ostriches and to the town of Oudtshoorn and the Cango Caves supposedly the third largest in the world. It had some lovely formations but the cave has been desecrated to make it more tourist accessible and there is evidence of vandalism. It does not begin to compare with Carlsbad.

Highgate Ostrich farm was very interesting. They have over 2000 birds. We are shown the ostrich nest where the mother sits on 10-12 eggs. The ostrich attacks with his feet and only can kick forward. In a small pen we are invited to sit on an ostrich and then are treated to an ostrich race. The baby birds are quite large and start eating stones at the age of 4 days. The stones stay in the bird's stomach and help to digest the food. The stones gradually wear away. Ostriches eat all sorts of things. We were later shown an exhibit of all the things they have found in ostrich's stomachs, sparkplugs, even a lady's heel! Lunch at the farm was a scrambled ostrich egg (as big as 28 chicken eggs) and ostrich steak. I rather liked the ostrich with its tasty flavor but many on the tour found it too tough.

Back at the Fancourt, a lovely cocktail party followed a massage. Marc had invited us to come between 6:45 and 7:00. Of course, Ann, who is not very bright had to comment, "Isn't Marc cheap to have a 15 minute cocktail party!" The 45-minute or so cocktail party complete with elegant hors d'oeuvres was followed by dinner in the Montegu Room, which was somewhat of a disaster. Very slow service and not very good food. Of course the complainers made sure we all realized this.

Saturday, October 25. We take the "Garden Route" along the shore of the Indian Ocean with the Tsitsikamma Mountains on one side and beaches with surf on the other. Huge sand dunes between the ocean and us are so old they are forested. Our first destination is the craft market at Knysna, where we shop for an hour. Near Harkerville we have a short walk through the Garden of Eden, a peaceful indigenous forest with big tree ferns underneath and tall stinkwood trees and huge 500 year-old yellow wood trees above. All part of the Tsitsikamma Forest Reserve.

We make a photo stop at "Plett" Plettenburg for a panoramic view of its sweeping beach and small fishing fleet. This is a seaside resort and also many retirees come into this area. Then back into the mountains, following the old road through more of the large forest, which covers much of this part of South Africa.

The indigenous people of this southern part of South Africa which we call Bushmen (the hunter-gatherers) are now called san and the Hottentots are now called the khoi people.

Lunch was at the Tsitsikamma Forest Hotel where the waitresses regale us with music and demonstrate the clicking sound, which appears in their language

Then we completed the drive to Port Elizabeth and flew to Durban and checked into the Royal Hotel. We have a Zulu Prince who has joined us to conduct our tour to the Zulu Kingdom in Natal Province, of which Durban is the capitol. Delicious curry dinner in the Ulandi restaurant at the hotel.

Sunday, October 26. On our city tour Charles, our guide, pointed out two statues. One to John Ross, the 14-year old redhead thought to be sort of a god to the Zulus. He saved the town from malaria, and then disappeared. The other was Dick King, a sort of Paul Revere who warned the British that the Dutch were coming. Then it was on to the waterfront area where Charles told us about the nets that control the sharks so the beaches are safe. Natal province can't afford customs officials, hence the harbor is open and much smuggling goes through here. We are shown Natal University and are given "lucky beads", seeds of the Kaffa, now called Coral, tree.

Durban Botanic garden founded 1849 has a lovely orchid house and a lake with many birds, among others the blue heron, national bird of South Africa. After the city tour we drove up into the mountains to Kwazulu Natal, the Valley of 1000 hills that is the heart of the Zulu kingdom.

His Royal Highness Prince Nhlanganislo, "the one who brings people together" is one of 16 sons, and 16 daughters, from 5 wives of the king. He is probably the successor to the present king. He is 26 and has just graduated from College with a degree in tourism and wants to develop tourism in the kingdom. "The more you meet other cultures, the more you grow," said the Royal

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Highness. He grew up with bodyguards and was very sheltered, but has now made his decision to live his own life. When asked how he could be safe, he said that he is somewhat of a national asset and that the people protect him. Around Durban he is recognized sometimes, but can usually walk freely. However, in Zululand, everyone knows him. At the Pot and Kettle Restaurant, we were offered salads for lunch, a welcome change from Travcoa's five-course lunches. We sat with the Prince at lunch and learned more about him. He is a very personable young man anxious that we should learn about his culture. "Bulls are separated from the females for 8 months and the Zulu men from age 18 to 25 do the same". Then groups of Zulus (up to 20) fight the bull with their hands and kill it using no spear or other implements. Also, when a white bull is born, it is presented to the King who then exchanges it for one of another culture. The king's mother has 8 children. He does not always have bodyguards, but when he went to Norway to visit the king, he was not allowed to go out and meet his peers or to enjoy the nightlife. He likes our American music.

The Zulus are very proud people and they have not intermarried with the other tribes in South Africa. They are the largest of the various tribes. We went into a tourist reconstruction of a traditional Zulu Village and were shown some traditional singing and dancing, and they acted out the courting procedure. An unmarried girl wears nothing above the waist; the engaged girl does cover her breasts, while a married woman wears a distinctive hat, which in olden times was actually sewn to her head. Women are definitely second-class citizens in Zululand and do all the work, while the men are in charge of protecting the women, drinking quantities of the Zulu beer and smoking marijuana, which they consider very healthful.

We were shown a cooking hut or kraal and a chief's kraal where the women had to sit on the left and the men on the right. The Zulus were a warrior tribe and conquered many other tribes, on whom they committed some atrocities. Today, the prince assures us, this is no longer true and the Zulus live in houses and lead modern lives. They do not agree with the Mandela government and the king's main job is to try and reconcile the differences between the various factions of the tribe. It is hoped the prince will be able to really unify everyone. (I wrote him after I got home at his email address,

zuluprince@write.com and received a cordial reply).

That night we went to a Braai or South African barbecue where we met some of the locals. Elias Khumalu was our host. He started off life as a gardener and now has a big house, two wives and 7 children. Mr. Khumalu is a partner of His Highness. We met Brian, the man who introduced Apple Computers to the country and was involved with South Africa's Olympic team. Also at the party was the king's legal advisor, his cousin, who gave an eloquent speech. It was a strange party however. The caterer didn't turn up until we got there and they were just starting to build the fire. There was beer to drink but very little preparation was going on. Mary and Ann went out to the kitchen and started shucking corn. The women of the house were cloistered away in one of the bedrooms. Apparently they weren't expected to participate. Finally about 9:30 the food was served, but there were no forks, only a few spoons. South Africans eat barbecue with their fingers. The corn and baked potatoes never did appear but there were quantities of food. There barbecued chicken, lamb and sausages, and various salads and a pasta dish. Much more food than we could eat. We are told some of the guests were lost or late and as we left for the hotel a few more people turned up.

Monday, October 27. 6:30AM departure to the airport, where we learn our plane has been cancelled. An hour late we took off for

Johannesburg, where we transferred to a small propeller plane for the hour flight to Skukuza. Then it was about an hour driving into the Kruger National Park and adjoining Mala Mala, where we stay at the elegant Mala Mala Game Resort. On the way from the airport we find impala, a big rhinoceros and some wart hogs. After a short time to freshen up in our luxurious kraals, which have two full bathrooms, we have our second lunch of the day.

At four we are loaded into 8-person land rovers and take off with Andrew, our personal guide for our stay, into the bush. There is a definite pecking order of seats in the truck, a comfortable front seat, and a bench for three slightly elevated above it and a back seat for two above that. We landed in the back seat where it was hard to see over the people in front of us (Gretchen wore a big hat complete with mosquito netting!) and where we couldn't hear Andrew's talking. It was also

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quite cold, but the ride was still fascinating. Mala Mala Game Park is a private reserve, and is much different from East Africa, rather flat but covered with vegetation, which makes finding the animals more difficult. Numerous sandy roads crisscross through the reserve and how Andrew tells them apart is beyond me. Johnson, our spotter sits behind us, and rifle graces our hood. We drive for two hours over bumpy roads or off-road seeing a giraffe family, zebra, velvet monkeys and baboons, the white rhinoceros, kudu, the ever-present impalas, cape buffalo rolling in the mud (part of a herd of 500), and the most exciting sighting was a small herd of breeding elephants. One started toward us and Andrew gunned the car and we drove off. The other animals seemed oblivious to us. A small dung beetle rolled his dung ball up a bank by the road, but lost it and it and he rolled back down. As it got dark, Andrew stopped the vehicle and produced a small table with tablecloth and we had a cocktail party, complete with hors d'oeuvres. A near catastrophe occurred when the cardboard box sheltering the paraffin stove caught fire, but the men put the flames out with bottled water. The hot hors d'oeuvres were good nonetheless. The only drawback was the lack of a WC! We did not feel safe venturing away from the truck. Then we were back in the truck for another two hours with Johnson swinging torchlight back and forth to make the game's eyes shine in the dark. For a long time we saw very little until we spied a rabbit, a lioness with her cub, another elephant and the eyes of a genet and bush baby. Just before we returned to the hotel we found a civet cat, which is not a cat but a relative of the mongoose family. Among the birds we sighted on our drive were the red-crested kormoran, the great blue eared glossy starling, the hoopoe, lilac breasted roller and hadedah ibis. After drinks in the bar, we are ushered into a reed-lined enclosure called a Bama, where a big bonfire was burning, for it has been cold all day. Delicious corn soup was followed by a big buffet. The only trouble was that the smoke from the fire was everywhere due to the downdrafts in the enclosure and I started having breathing problems. Andrew walked me back to my room (you aren't allowed to go alone after dark) and I fell into bed and slept soundly until the 5:45 wake-up call.

Tuesday, October 28. After wake-up coffee we were back in the trucks for another drive. I got the front seat, which was a relief for my aching back. This morning we saw bigger herds of animals. Instead of three zebra we saw a much bigger group and many more giraffes. There were buffalo and wildebeests, kudus and the small gray duiker. One special view was of a cheetah with her kill of a duiker. We saw a small pride of young lions. The highlight of the drive, however, was the leopards. These animals are very elusive hidden in the bush, but Johnson's sixth sense found them. We could hear the yells of the birds above telling of their presence. Johnson assured us there was a nervous male leopard in the bushes. We waited some time and then he leaped out and ran off. Later we found a female leopard in another bush that allowed us to study her more closely.

Back at the lodge for a late breakfast we are told of the walks planned before the next game drive at 4:00. Mary went, but I took a nap! She reported she was glad I did not take the walk. The four o'clock drive also produced some thrills. We saw an old giraffe straddling a sapling tree so he could scratch off the ticks. Andrew reported he had not seen these phenomena before. Then we found another leopard stalking a bushbuck. She was getting ready to pounce but a branch was in her way. Then the buck realized she was there and turned to face her, barking somewhat like a dog to warn the other animals away. The leopard won't attack from the front since horns would be used against her. Later on we found a small pride of lions, a young male, two lionesses and five adorable cubs. Unfortunately the male and one lioness had some injury to their legs and were limping badly. It was sad to watch them and know that if they don't recover the young ones will die. Nothing is done in the Preserve unless they feel an epidemic is taking place since they want nothing to interfere with the natural way. We followed and stayed with the pride a long time to let the other land rovers come and see them also. As a result we missed our cocktail party! On the way back to camp we found three hippos feeding in the brush, so we have seen all five of the big mammals! Dinner was held in the restaurant of the lodge without smoke and the ladies who served came out and sang for us.

Wednesday, October 29. At last the sun is starting to come out although it is still cool (last week they had temperatures in the 100s!). The prettiest day, but we saw less game than on the other

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drives. Did watch the herd of water buffalo for a time. An old bull was trying to copulate with some of the cows. Then a long drive through a sort of savannah area where we spotted a few impala, wildebeests, kudus and a steinbuck. Even saw a bull wart hog running close to where we were. Andrew tells us this is a more common sort of run. The other three have been well above average. Aren't we lucky!

After breakfast we pack and get ready for the 11:00 am departure for the airport.

After the flight to Johannesburg we are loaded into a bus with box lunches and driven 2 1/2 hours to Sun City. This resort was developed as a gambling resort and is now a complex of three hotels encompasses golf courses, water parks and so forth. The Palace Hotel is a flamboyant creation of concrete and plastic. Elephants, leopards and impala seem to jump off its concrete towers. Inside, except for a marble floor in the reception and ground floor, it is ornately ornamented with more concrete features. Huge pseudo palm trees, chairs with fake leopard upholstery, a huge concrete elephant at a meeting place. It all seems the epitome of tastelessness. Our group is all stunned that Travcoa would bring us here after all the lovely places we have been enjoying. Our room is massive with a large bathroom reached through sliding paneled doors. Aside from the fact that we have to get the engineering staff up to figure out how to use their electric adapters, a shortage of good illumination, and no sound barrier from the hall, it has every comfort. Mary takes a shower and finds the towels are not clean although neatly folded on the racks. We are not happy campers but Marc assures us he will straighten everything out. I suggest among other things that he change the 6AM departure on Friday so that the majority of the group does not have to leave with the four going to Zimbabwe. Marc has had a hard time with the complainers on this trip and I hate to add to his burdens but Sun City is not my idea of a great place to be. Travcoa should make this an optional extension.

Thursday, October 30. Now that we are over our initial shock we set out to explore the complex and find lovely gardens and vistas, an interesting aviary and shops. I spend the morning in the beauty shop with a massage and much needed manicure and shampoo.

After a hasty lunch in the food court Mary and I decide to go to the top of the main tower for the view, and have a hard time finding the way. At last, after climbing 3 or 4 flights of stairs we find it and the lovely view, and only THEN we find the elevator that takes us down!

Then we make a game drive in nearby Prinsendam National Park. It is such a comedown from Mala Mala. Many more people in tour-bus-like vehicles proceeding in almost lockstep around the roads in the park. No off-road travel at all. Predictably we did not see a great deal of game ... and much of what we saw was off in the distance, although we did get good close-up views of warthogs, zebras and wildebeests and for the first time we saw the red hartebeests. The area is artificial, an ancient volcano crater which was cleared of everything, and then turned into a habitat for the reintroduced animals. I believe they are trying to create Ngorangora like the one in Tanzania. It all seemed rather manicured, like driving through a zoo or animal park in the US. We are so lucky to have seen Mala Mala!

Marc has a farewell cocktail party and then we go to the Peninsula Restaurant at the Cascade Hotel for a nice farewell dinner. We bid Marc farewell since he leaves with the Zimbabwe group in the early morning.

Friday October 31. 8:30AM departure for Johannesburg and day rooms at the Michelangelo Hotel. Mary and I had thought of doing a museum or something, but the more we think of the 30-hour day ahead of us the less enthusiasm we have. We settle for walking around the huge shopping center adjoining the hotel, lunch in a small Italian restaurant and followed by a nap. Mary leaves at 3:30 for the Miami flight. My New York flight leaves at 8:00 PM. Marc, of course has left, so Stewart, the guide, handles the transfer to the airport. It is obvious he has not done this much before. First of all the schedule was wrong and he gets us to the airport over 3 hours before flight time. Then he tries to check us in as a group and much to my dismay, I find my bags checked with the Barr's. It is quite a mess getting the bags back so they can be checked in my name and with the priority 1st Class tags. The flight was long but I slept most of the way.

Seven hours out of Johannesburg we stopped at the Cape Verde Islands to refuel. I got off the plane to see what was there but all it was, was a waiting room filled with smoke as all the smokers got off to satisfy their addictions. They didn't want to let me back on the plane until they

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called the flight but I snuck back on with the new crew and gratefully climbed back into my snug bed with the dubay.

Seven hours later we were at JFK, 30 minutes early. My sister met me and we went to Morristown where I really felt good all day although got very tired all of a sudden about 7:00PM.

Sunday and Monday. Nice visit with the Krementzs. We went to a Sunday matinee of A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum with John Wright. Fun production and we had dinner at Charlottes in the Millennium Hotel afterwards. Monday we went to see "Seven Years in Tibet", and that night the Thomases came over for dinner.

Home to Atlanta on Tuesday.