Almost a Year in Saudi

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Friday, September 26 - Saudi Arabia
Tuesday morning of September 23rd, amidst pouring Vancouver rain, I climbed into a taxicab at 0500 hours, alongside two large and two small pieces of luggage. A final good-bye hug and wave to Val, at whose place I'd spent the night, and I was off to the airport. I departed Vancouver at 0730 to arrive at Chicago airport at 1345, transferred planes to depart at 1416 arriving at John F. Kennedy Airport, New York by 1730.

Outside Gate 12, while awaiting the 2100-hour flight to Jeddah, I caught the first impressions of what I was heading to in Saudi Arabia. It became more than a dream, more than a book reflection. Reality inched in. I watched three white robed men in thobes (neck to ankle cotton apparel, looking like white shirts someone forgot to shorten – tailored around the top, with long sleeves, side pockets and front buttons from neck to mid-chest level). More and more individuals were gathering to await flight. Women's attire varied from western dress to long caftans with black head scarves to black abayas – the loose-fitting cloak or dress-like affair that covered them from the neck to the ground. Some came to mid-hip area with a long dress or skirt worn beneath. Their heads were wrapped in black scarves – some with the face revealed, some with just the eyes revealed – some with even the eyes masked behind the black mesh. Fingers and wrists were heavily adorned with gold jewellery. Feet moved in bright stylish shoes, often with three-to-four-inch heels. Children raced around in western dress, contrasting strangely with the attire of their parents.

Around 1900 hours a man dressed in white thobe and white head-dress positioned himself (after some deliberation) facing the ticket counter and began chanting the Islam call to prayer. About fifteen minutes later, I entered the Gate 12 waiting area and saw various men laying prayer mats out and prayers beginning. They began going through their ritual of prayers and motions which varied from standing, to kneeling, to bowing until the head touched the floor – then looking both ways over their shoulders from a half-sitting position and bowing again, but all according to their own inner schedule. Where had I got the idea that everyone prayed at exactly the same time with the same motions? From church services of my own upbringing? Those who arrived later simply began at their beginning and continued, so that, with the latecomers, the prayers carried on for at least forty-five minutes, although the individual prayer time seemed to range between ten and fifteen minutes.

The 746 flight to Jeddah was outwardly uneventful. Inwardly, I absorbed the Koran *Prayer for Travellers* chanted in Arabic over the intercom as the flight began. I didn't know what it said but the sound was rich and melodic. Beneath me, out the small porthole window, the grey Atlantic was swiftly eclipsed by night. It was strange sensation, to be sitting in one place, knowing that half the world was passing beneath me. We were flying into the sun. All the windows shades were pulled down early to maintain the illusion of night. Around 0300 I lifted the shade slightly and was half-blinded by the brilliance of sunlight. It proved to be a wakeful night, interspersed with dozing and watching fragments of a Walt Disney movie with Arabic subtitles – 'The Journey of Nattie Gan'. I kept thinking "*I've come all this way to see this?*"

I knew there were three other westerners, also contracted to Al Hada, who were heading to Taif on this flight – two from Canada, one from New York – but I did not meet them until a few hours before reaching Jeddah where we landed at the local time of 1600 hours. It was a relief to link up with others who would go through the same series of events that would lead us to Taif. We left

the plane to enter the wall of thick muggy heat of Jeddah airport. After customs, Karen, (from St John's Newfoundland – tall and blond, with a self-confident brassy voice), Elizabeth (from Toronto – smaller, shyer, with large dark eyes, olive skin, dark hair and an excited smile), and Rodney (from Rochester, New York – slight build, with an intense, Van Gogh type of face), and I were finally located by an employee of the hospital placement services and booked into the hotel adjoining the airport (King Abdul Assiz Hotel) with supper and breakfast vouchers.

Rodney and I received separate rooms. Karen and Elizabeth shared. Already the patterns of our future were in effect. After supper (around 2030) we wanted to explore this international city before hitting the greater restrictions of Taif, so we headed by local bus into downtown Jeddah to visit the market (souq). All of us felt quite 'spacey' and excited between jet lag, culture change, and the sense of adventure. The bus we caught into Jeddah was divided – men rode up front, women in the rear. A thick, translucent, plexi-glass barricade, with space for hands to reach payment into a box, divided the front half of the bus from the back. The driver could see (but not too clearly) if there were women at the back exit wanting to get off. There were no apparent bells or buzzers, so getting off meant pounding on the door and yelling louder than the traffic and conversation noises until the bus driver noticed us and opened the rear door. We wandered through a small part of downtown Jeddah, where streets reminded me of an outdoor mall, but with fewer sales signs plastered over windows and walls. Here, bargaining with customers was verbal rather than visual. It was after 2100 hours when we arrived, and the stores were beginning to close for the night.

Talking with Karen, Elizabeth, and Rodney, I realized that certain aspects of this country had already impacted them more than me. They were quite nervous about being together, feeling that single men and women shouldn't talk to one another in this country. It had also worried them in the airport when we were going through customs. After about an hour downtown and a taxi return to the hotel, we stopped in the hotel restaurant for a coffee. Karen and Elizabeth described how uneasy they felt about being stared at. I hadn't particularly noticed, or felt that side of things, but my mind was not in thinking mode. I felt as if I must absorb surroundings without direct focusing, so as to assimilate the present moment. Difficult to put into words – it was more a state of being, rather than reacting or thinking. I did not try to interpret what I saw, so did not feel uneasy in the same way. The sense of 'being a minority' was an intellectual awareness but not an emotional reality.

We talked until midnight, then went to our rooms. Another sleepless night. The air-conditioning was far too cold after the sauna-like heat of Jeddah. I spent the time reflecting on the evening experiences. The squares of buildings, mostly made of concrete or adobe-like brick. Many, many windowless and empty buildings. Names written in calligraphic Arabic with occasional English translations such as Kraft, Chevy, Gulf, Pharmacy, Food-store, Furniture. Many, many furniture stores. Garages of eighteen pumps and more. Highways of six lanes and neon signs. Many, many gold shops. Mosques. Honking horns. Vehicles riding the white line until honked right or left. People crossing streets by up-raised hands and traffic dodging. The man from Bangladesh who started talking with Rodney on the bus, and not only directed us to the marketplace, but guided us back to catch a cab back to the hotel.

The souq was closing down bit by bit while we were there and it was after 2200 hours when we left. Men's dress varied from western to Saudi style, with women conservatively dressed – most wearing versions of the abaya – some in full purdah. Many children being carried around and cared for by both parents, and seemingly very much cherished. All shades of skin tone. Very modern architecture, with a social undertone that ran through the streets – it was a place of visiting and socialising as well as shopping. Modernity hadn't erased that aspect of life.

Thursday September 25
We were up by 0500, breakfast at 0600 and the airport by 0700. Boarding by 0800, flight by 0930, reaching Taif by 1000. Ghutras (men) and purdah (women) were more the rule once we left the international city of Jeddah. Many ghutras were red and white checked, like Greek tablecloths. Someone said it signified a member of the extended royal family – the House of Saud – and their followings. Quite possibly. With Taif being the summer home of the royals it could explain the dramatic prevalence of the red/white headpieces, each with a thick black cord bound twice around the upper part of the head.

Taif. We disembarked to a dryer, more tolerable heat. After collecting our luggage we were driven to Al Hada Hospital – about a twenty-minute drive. There was silence in the car as we stared at the countryside of what was to be our main home for the next two years. At first sight it reminded me of the Thompson Valley area around Cashe Creek and Kamloops in British Columbia, except sandier – drier – rockier. The hills and rocky outlays stretched in hues of brown, beige, gold, red, with stunted bush trees that looked like sturdy tumbleweeds. Along the highways, palm trees were planted, bound by concrete boulevards and walkways in what seemed like the middle of nowhere. Near one of the of a bridges crossing over the roadway beneath, I noticed a large grey tent pitched, with a battered car parked beside it. It was obviously the mobile home of one family in this rugged, brown landscape, criss-crossed by the tarmac and concrete of the roadways.

All the drivers were men. It is illegal for women to drive. Vehicles were everywhere: trucks, cars, and jeeps. Most drivers were wearing the white thobe and the red-white head-cloths (ghutras). If women were visible through car windows, they were invariably totally black – black ghosts, but men appeared to be attentive to them. When seen walking down the street the women walked behind. When seated, the men hovered around them possessively. The bonds between men and women may be written in a different rule book, but the spiritual connections that tie people to one another are universal.

During a conversation with Rodney, Elizabeth and Karen, we discussed what drew us here. Both Karen and Rodney had been searching for overseas work for some time and were finally accepted by Saudi Charter Medical, the company that had hired us for Al Hada. Elizabeth had applied after a close friend of hers arrived elsewhere in Saudi and convinced her to come. My reasons for applying seemed distant and unreal. I awoke one morning last March feeling that there was someone I had to meet in Saudi Arabia, so threw in an application – other reasons grew afterwards (the usual ones of saving money, adventure and travel). Curiously enough, although it's great to be travelling, the adventure doesn't really feel like an adventure. Taking things day by day, it is simply a matter of doing what comes next. My last three weeks in Vancouver, while preparing to leave the country for two years, presented far more complications and challenges. Arriving in Saudi was, by contrast, quite simple. One thing at a time.

On the ride towards the hospital we saw many one-story buildings, invariably crumbling away near the top and without foundations to keep them level, so that the long low structures tended to undulate with the ground. There were small marketplaces – souqs – like rows of warehouses in the middle of nowhere; made of yellow brick, with large, open fronts revealing the contents within, which looked like bits of everything and anything. There would be about six stores to a row, like a strip-mall, then nothing for several kilometres. Then another row – then another, further on. On the hills I saw many trucks and signs of digging – as if putting in some kind of pipeline? waterline? It was a downwards digging rather than a constructional digging; then more

buildings. Road-signs kept indicating Taif was up ahead, and Al Hada, and Makkah (Mecca?). We by-passed Taif, arriving, at last at the hospital. It was 1100 hours. We were tired and hungry.

The driver, a Saudi whose name I forget, took us up to Personnel where we were introduced to Mr. Lamadabi, a white haired, soft-spoken man in his mid-to-late fifties. He was pale skinned, dressed in white thobe and ghutra, and I immediately wondered at his ancestry as there seemed to be some interracial influences. He spoke quietly, so we had to strain our ears slightly to listen. His words sounded bland, almost cottonish, but beneath the softness was a razor edge that could cut if needed. He welcomed us, then said he would postpone the paper signing and orientation until Saturday morning, so that we could have time to recover from the long journey. I sensed that he really had other plans and didn't want to lose the rest of the day signing things that could easily wait. Later I realized that it was Thursday afternoon and Friday was the holy day for Muslims and the day of rest: the Sunday equivalent. His weekend was beginning.

Then Kathleen entered – the Assistant Director of Nursing. She was tall and blond, with an arrogant bearing – attractive in a concise and organised way. She told me that, because I was to be working at the Rehabilitation Centre, I would be placed in the residence near the Rehab centre in Taif. (Al Hada Hospital is about a 20-minute drive from Taif town centre – well beyond the edges of town.) The others would stay at the hospital compound. Rodney would go into the male residence and Karen and Elizabeth into the female residence. We went back outside and waited near the truck with our luggage still packed in it. It was a long wait.

Eventually a man with a car arrived and Rodney was taken to his new abode. Elizabeth, Karen and I were driven towards the women's residence. The Housekeeper met us but seemed a bit confused since she had been told I'd stay here a few days – but suddenly arrangements were being made to take me to the Rehab residence right away. We had another stretch of waiting in front of the three apartment units that were the female residence, then Karen and Elizabeth headed towards their new rooms – both a bit upset that they would be separated. At Al Hada each two-bedroom apartment unit was shared between two women, and they would be sharing with strangers.

A car finally arrived to take me to Taif. The driver was Pakistani. He told me that Saudi men were not permitted to drive an unmarried females. (Yet in Jeddah, many Saudis appeared to be taxi drivers – or was I mistaken somewhere?)

It was a fast, fifteen-minute drive to Taif, and the residence. We passed by King Khalid gardens and the driver explained that they were very nice, but that one day was posted for men to visit and the next day for women with no gender-mixing allowed. Children above the age of thirteen were considered adults when observing such customs.

I was gradually becoming more aware of my height. Standing five foot seven, I was taller than most people I had met so far. An introduction to the five-foot tall (if that) housing assistant reinforced my awareness. Vicki was a Filipino employee, pretty and slightly distracted, who carried my suitcase while I carried the two packsacks and sleeping bag that comprised the rest of my luggage. The suitcase weighed an easy sixty pounds plus – and watching her struggle with it made me feel guilty that I had over-packed. Despite my remonstrations, she refused to leave it for me to come back to, so I shrugged and offered my thanks. Tiredness was catching up with me.

My next question was what to do about lunch. It was nearing 1300 hours and all I had eaten for breakfast was a peach. After depositing the stuff in my room, Vicki apologised for fact there was

no bedding or dishes in the room – but I had not been expected today, so the stuff would be awhile arriving. She also said there was no cafeteria, or anywhere to get food at the moment, so she recruited me back to her place, sat me down and offered me lunch. Food never tasted so good. I asked about abayas and found out that my black three-quarter length cotton coat would do adequately for the time being. She said that if I wanted to meet her friends and herself at the entrance gate of the housing compound (by the security guard building that watched everyone who entered and left the compound) by 1715, they would take me shopping on the bus, so that I could buy food to cover the weekend. Meanwhile, I returned to my room.

My room reminded me of the dormitory I had in nurse's training. It is a little larger though, with less closet space, a complete bathroom, a double burner hot plate atop a half fridge, and in the main body of the room, a desk and chair, a chest of drawers, a bed and an armchair. The window is large overlooking the six-lane roadway and on the opposite side of the street some form of a defence base, a mosque tower visible in the distance, brown-gold rocky hills, and a further settlement off to the right that looks like the hilltop village of some forgotten storybook. Just below the window are palm-type plants, spiky bushes and another bush branching out in rose-pink flowers. Ants and flies, of course, are international accompaniments.

I unpacked slowly then laid down on the bare mattress to doze – not daring to sleep in case I missed the bus. Had I fallen asleep, I doubted if I'd waken for some time. About an hour later, Vicki arrived with some kitchenware: a bowl, a pot, six forks, two knives, a garlic press, a spoon strainer, a spatula, two large and two small plates, two cups with saucers, and two small glasses. Later she arrived with a kettle and two spoons to add to the collection. By the time I returned from town around 1930, there was bedding and towels. I was moved in.

The visit to town, as seen through sleep-ridden eyes: At 1700 I went down to the guard's gate and found I had to sign out (name, employee number, destination and purpose). When I said I did not yet have an employee number (since I had not yet signed the appropriate documents at Al Hada), one of the women, also waiting for the bus to town, waved it off as unimportant. A couple of later arrivals, including Vicki, did not bother to sign out at all (unless someone else had signed for them). Most of the bus occupants were Filipino. I followed Vicki and her friends into Taif, getting off at building called 'Building One'. I followed them down back streets and into a grocery store that stocked almost everything imaginable from sewing supplies to soap, legumes, dairy products, biscuits, bread, perfumes and films. I wondered if the place was slanted somewhat towards the Filipino cooking, since the cashiers and most of the shoppers within it were Filipino. Fifty-four Saudi riyals later (local currency equalling about two riyals to the Canadian dollar), I had the absolute basics. Prices were generally about twice what I was used to paying in Canada. I came home with rice, dry peas, gruel, soya sauce, ketchup, lemon juice, curry powder, coffee, dish soap, and laundry detergent.

I followed Vicki and her friends into a separate store for the fresh produce. I was surprised to find cabbage, green beans, onions, bananas, carrots etc. On leaving the grocery store, a small container of olive oil was thrown in, which I later learned was the result of the Filipinos I was with, arguing for *baksheesh* for me, because I was new. *Baksheesh*, I was to learn was extra stuff thrown in free, sometimes bargained for, sometimes given as a recognition that you were a regular customer and would come back again.

Afterwards we went on to another store. Once again, a tin of olive oil was thrown in free. When I said I already had one tin of the oil there was a lot of laughter among the Filipinos. I ended up with the two tins anyway feeling a bit bewildered. At one of the produce stores, my expenditure of twenty riyals resulted in four apples, one pound of beans, two pounds of onions and two

pounds each of cabbage and carrots. I was quite willing to pay the requested money, but Vicki made sure two bananas thrown into my bag for the same price. I was just beginning to catch on. Afterwards we went to the 'female waiting area' for the Rehab bus, in front of Building 1, where we waited the hour until the bus arrived for our return.

After apples for supper, I went to bed early, awaking by 0600 on Friday. The morning finished my unpacking. The laundry room was down the hall, so I did a washing. I saw only one person pass during the day which gave a sense of eeriness about the place. I heard nothing from the other rooms on the floor, although there were remote signs of people being around, such as a full garbage tin, that at a later point, became an empty one. I walked about outside to check the place out. Both the recreation centre and the pool area were locked and deserted, so I could ask no questions. I returned to my room and spent the rest of the day tidying up, napping and starting my diary. Around 1030, the sound of the Imam summoning Muslims to prayer echoed from somewhere across the street outside my window. The voice seemed was magnified by some huge loudspeaker.

At the same time, I could hear music in the hallway, sounding loud and familiarly English. I went into the hallway, wanting to find someone who could tell me the bus times, so I could go to Al Hada tomorrow. To be there by 0900 I figured I might have to leave by 0755 – maybe earlier. Passing by the closed, anonymous doors in the hall, I found one door slightly ajar – the source of the music. An Irish girl answered the door – Dolores. She had a pixie-like freckled face surrounded by shoulder length, brown, curling hair. She told me there was another Canadian on this floor (the door between hers and mine) who was also named Pam. And mentioned that the bus schedule was posted near the elevator at the end of the hall. That was all. I sensed her need to be alone and wondered if her loud music was an attempt to shut the place out? I recalled another woman who I saw yesterday, while waiting for the bus. She was pale, yellow-haired, wearing jeans and an abaya. I met her glance once, but her face seemed stony as if holding in unhappiness and depression. I could find no words to introduce myself and she looked away immediately, holding herself aloof. She then moved outside the waiting area for the rest of the time we waited for the bus.

There was a desperate side to this place. It seemed to contain a love/hate atmosphere with no in-betweens. Perhaps in time, some of my impressions will clarify. But tonight, it is already nearing 2300 hours and tomorrow promises to be an involved day, so I’m now off to bed. Oh yes – evidently E Coli is present in the tap water so all water should be boiled or bought. I'm not great on that kind of detail, so maybe it's time for some 'positive thinking' since I believe that one's attitude can do a lot to maintain health and energy.

September 27, 1986
Either I am needing less sleep or have not yet shifted my habitual sleeping hours: I awoke twice before finally deciding to arise at 0400, which allowed for some meditation time. The solitudes of the past 24 plus hours have felt good. I look forwards to whatever today will bring. Traffic noises possessed the street at all hours of the night – though less noisy between midnight and four. I suspect this is a country that is very flexible about waking/sleeping hours. With the heat of the day it makes far more sense to be sleeping, channelling and storing energies for the cooler hours.

It is almost five o'clock in the morning. The call to prayer echoes into the easing darkness – a haunting sound.

At 0700 I found a note under my door from Kate Camerelli. She will be my nursing supervisor in the Rehab Centre. The note welcomed me to rehab, mentioning she hoped to see me tonight.

0800 hours found me waiting for the bus to take the half-hour trip from Taif to Al Hada Hospital up the hill. I practised my meditations while listening to Arabic conversations in the background. By 0900, I was at Al Hada, in the office of Mr. Lamadabi. Karen and Elizabeth arrived slightly later, and later still, Rodney. The day accelerated between being issued with our medical numbers, handing over passports, getting fitted for uniforms, being given a vague outline as to the next few days and growing increasingly confused.

The day revealed the complete cut-off of communication between Al Hada and the Rehab Centre. No one at Al Hada could tell me anything about Rehab. After a very basic orientation, such as signing papers and getting uniforms, I was told only that I had to pick up the rest of my hemmed uniforms tomorrow at ten-thirty (two white pantsuit uniforms with long tops) and would be oriented to the Rehab Centre but no one could tell me who would orient me or what I could expect or when to show up for work. It was as good an excuse as any I've had for an irritated outburst. I asked what the hell they wanted me to do – getting only a shrug of the shoulders for response. I'm tired of floating around being ignored. Talking to Elizabeth and Karen, I discovered that they had been given a bit of food to start them off with, taken into Taif, shown where to purchase and abaya and essentially welcomed to Al Hada. It made my experience of the past 36 hours seem very bizarre in comparison.

By 1600 we were all bewildered enough with orientation and headed into town, where I finally purchased an abaya (which is a joke so far as cover goes – it’s almost see-through and more like a quasi-cape that every breeze blows astray – but has a fun feel to it.) The colour black, and the wearing of it admits to our respect of Saudi customs regarding females, but only a quasi-respect. There still seems to be an attitude that assumes western women are all prostitutes of one degree or another.

I returned from downtown by 2030, walking back to building 85 (my building) – room 2-9 (second floor, ninth door) and saw the door 2-2 with a name printed below the number – Kate Camerelli. I quickly dropped off my town purchases and returned to knock on the door and meet my nursing supervisor at Rehab. Kate is Australian, about thirty, slender, of medium height with a narrow, attractive face and short, dark-brown hair. (She seems to have a low opinion of herself – talking in an almost-annoying, self-depreciating manner.) She was nervous, quick and intense in her actions, rolling and smoking endless cigarettes, but down-to-earth and practical, once we got talking. We talked for almost three hours about what I could expect, the type of patients I would be nursing, when and how to show up for work, etc. Some of the information was expected, some new and most will take time and getting into the work to really sink in.

Tomorrow, I will pick up my uniforms from Al Hada and return to the Rehabilitation Centre, which is the low flat building just beyond and to the left of the military buildings across the street. Then I will be oriented to the place.

I found out that the address that I gave to everyone back home is incorrect. The Rehab address is PO Box 1518, so much letter writing remains to be done. I will be working for the next five days – eight-hour stretches – with Thursday/Friday off (the weekend) and then will begin my regular twelve-hour shifts, working four shifts per week (i.e. forty-eight hours per week, as per contract). The rest I will find out as it happens.

One item I forgot to mention: in surrendering our passports, we were told we could pick up our egamas (in-country passports for foreigners – complete with Arabic permits and photos) in about two weeks. No travel is permitted until then.

September 28, 1986
This is a country of walls. Walls bordering buildings, surrounding the compounds, around empty patches of ground and along roadways. Stone walls, rock walls, brick walls, concrete walls that include falling-down, brand-new, beginning nowhere and ending nowhere. They seem less a means of security than a means of breaking up space. They are arbitrary, some around city blocks, some part way up a hill, some blocking a road, seemingly holding nothing out and nothing in.

Morning began by bussing up to Al Hada to pick up my uniforms and carry on a brief conversation with Mr. Lamadabi re: picking up my nursing diploma. His benign smile greeted me when I asked when it would be copied so that I could collect it.

Me: When would be a good time to come up here? I live at Rehab. Working there, I can't get up here during the days.
L. : Anytime. Anytime.
Me: What hours are you open? Eight to four?
L. : Yes. Yes, Eight to four. Any day. Anytime.
Me: I will have to catch the bus from Rehab. How about Thursday?
(Knowing Thursday is the beginning of the weekend)
L. : Thursdays until twelve.
Me: Friday?
L. : No. Not Friday. We are closed Friday.
Me: (with a smile, having the knowledge for which I was asking) Thank you.

I leave with the strange understanding that we have reached a mutual understanding and respect/liking. Even questing for information is a matter of bargaining with words until you get what you want. I now know the hours that this place is open but will not hold my breath on the diploma being ready to pick up on the Thursday.

Orientation to the rehabilitation centre left me feeling quite confused. The floor plan included one section that is totally reserved (and each year redecorated to the tune of tens of thousands of riyals) for one of the princesses who had suffered a stroke. She stays here during Ramadan (the main religious holiday of the year). The wing is known as the VIP suite. Every hospital contains a VIP section which is for royalty, their relatives, or for those certain valued, devout followers who apply to a given prince for proper honour and respect when hospitalised. As the day wore on, names and faces blended and blurred. I spent the last hour of the day on the ward I will start working on tomorrow, known as Male II. No doubt all will fall into place in time.

Janet and I headed back to the compound together. She is a British nurse who began work a few days before I did. She’s in her late 30's – a square welcoming face, with hair cropped so short that I thought at first glance she was a young man. Her laughter is infectious. I stopped at her place for coffee (about 4 rooms down from my own) and we talked about early impressions. Gassia joined us – British – buoyant – slightly plump with a fresh young face surrounded by startling white hair. The golden tone of her skin emphasises the whiteness of her hair. She has Armenian ancestry, was born in Syria and some 20 years ago trained as a nurse in England and obtained her British citizenship. She speaks fluent Arabic.

I found myself listening their conversation and realizing that the political undercurrents between Rehab and Al Hada were quite potent. Both Janet and Gassia were upset at being placed in this more isolated set-up, without the social or practical conveniences of the main Al Hada compound. There are no telephones at all here – whereas every adjoining room has a phone in the compound at the main hospital. The pool there is private – for women only – and regularly cleaned, while here the pool is central to all the units (being 2 'female' apartment buildings and two 'married-quarters' apartment buildings). It is perpetually locked with no regular times for anyone, so scarcely used. The community centre at Al Hada is open – here it is locked. There is a separate staff cafeteria open all day at Al Hada, but here only lunch is available in a small staff room at the Rehab Centre. Maintenance is not kept up here. There is no shop on the compound (for groceries), as there is at Al Hada. Room supplies here are minimal and contact with other westerners is poor.

I think there are about 6 of us (westerners) with the rest of the nursing staff being Filipino. Bus service into town is almost non-existent comparatively speaking. I found myself in a gap between their complaints and my needs. The conversation began to bore me. I am not here to catch the social scene or to run up lists of complaints plus I am used to eating alone and sparingly. Making do is a way of life for me and perhaps I need more solitude than they. I feel curiously at home here; as if I have already been here for a long time – not the scant five days of the calendar.

Pam Harris is the other Canadian here. She is tall with olive brown skin and a regal bearing. She has the poise, inner confidence and arrogance of a sharp-featured Egyptian princess. She's in room 2-8, beside mine having come from Toronto five months ago. I knocked on her door once to introduce myself and was met coldly and indifferently. I will not try again.

On the bus trip to Al Hada, I counted the number of gas tanks that I saw at one of the gas stations we passed. I have never seen so many gas tanks at one gas station, and it seems to be the rule here. There were forty-eight filling tanks; twelve per row, four rows deep and I have yet to see more than three or four vehicles at time stopping for gas.

September 29, 1986
Here is a summary of feelings and sensations from my orientation at the extended care facility called 'Rehab'. There is no further place to go for these individuals. Twenty years ago they would not have survived. Now they survive and no one seems to want them. The inmates include quadriplegics, spastic children, head injuries, paraplegics, strokes. This is the only rehabilitation unit in the country. It is a dead end, both literally and figuratively. An institutional prison created by modern medicine.

To walk across the six-lane street, separating the residence compound from the military base and Rehab Centre, is to take your life in your hands. It is considered a great joke by many drivers to speed up as fast as they can while passing Rehab Housing, to see how close they can come to hitting us while we cross the street to and from work. They manage to swerve and avoid us only at the last moment. If an accident occurs in our presence we are told to walk away. Blame will always be allocated to foreigners if injury or death occurs and a foreigner is in any way involved.

There seems to be a sense of childishness about many Saudis (I say this in the sense of old-soul/young-soul peoples – they seem more young-soul – i.e. not strong on self-reflection or world-overviews) – they are like children given the power to manipulate and control – the dangerous power of children filling adult roles without the associated wisdom. Positions are filled

more by family connection and influence than by understanding or awareness of the job to be accomplished. They are a desert people who have very suddenly acquired a veneer of modernity with no understanding of how or what it is about, which leaves one with a sense of bizarre contradictions.

Buildings such as the Rehabilitation Centre are about six years old and already falling apart through shoddy workmanship. Edgings have been left unfinished. The marble windowsills have gaps with loose and/or crooked windowpanes. Microwaves, xerox machines etc. are most likely not working since maintenance and repairs are not native concepts. Lists of ward supplies are made up – but on the whim of administrators, who must sign for the release of materials, some things may be allowed and some not. There is no rule and no logic, except the rule of the moment.



Looking towards Taif – view from a window at Rehab

The Filipino staff come off the worst. They make lower wages than the Westerners and tend to be treated as second class servants (the Westerner being a higher-class kind of servant). About eighty percent of the staff is Filipino. The money they earn is enough to support their extended families in the Philippines but puts them in a position of being bound to the job and the Saudis know it. Where I have a small room to myself, they are often two and sometimes three to a room. They work overtime hours for regular pay and are perpetually in fear of job loss if too

many complaints are made by the patients or by themselves. There is only one floor of westerners in this particular set of female buildings, (8 westerners that I know of at this point), so there has been no attempt to keep up the standards of the area because most of the occupants are Filipinos. Telephones were once here and removed with the excuse that they were used too much by the Filipinos – yet the Filipinos are expected to carry out work that no Saudi would attempt.

There is an immaturity about the Saudis in regard to the games the western world lives – as we would be considered immature/ ignorant in the ways of the desert. They are caught between the past and the present. Materially they have come so far so fast that their psyche has not yet caught up with the (so-called) modernity of the western world.

September 30, 1986
A sense of familiarity begins to emerge. When working with the Filipinos I am reminded of articles I have read about '*gentle, peace-loving, fun-loving Lemurians*'. I sometimes get the feeling they have links to those ancient souls where community – brotherhood/ sisterhood – is a way of being. Similar to the idea that our western world reflects the more isolated, individualistic arrogance of Atlanteans.

Today is Tuesday and month's end. One week ago today I departed Vancouver. The eternity of the now has taken hold and this is my place of being. Lately afternoon skies have been sheeted in grey thick cloud. Today, there is dry lightning and thunder with a smell of dampness in the air – as if in wait for a downpour that never quite emerges. The storm passes inland.

October 1,1986
I am one week in this country. It tastes/ smells/ feels of always. There is a strange sense of familiarity here. My reactions surprise me. Rehab/extended care is as it would be anywhere. My goals must be placed outside of working, since there is nothing in the work scene that enthuses me, although I like and enjoy people, my dislike of nursing as a job remains an inner dread and it has been so since training days. I survive nursing by means of doing my best for the people I like to work with, which includes both patients and other staff.

Outside goals. I must learn what I can of the Arabic. Already I have acquired a minimal vocabulary; maybe a dozen words:

hammam = bathroom;
shoukran = thank you;
hellas = finish;
mallish = doesn't matter;
rridgelee = my leg;
rridgelac = your leg;
terherak = your back;
moya = water;
sucr= sugar;
cundra = shoes;
arabea = wheelchair;
asthma ana = listen to me;
naam = yes;
la = no; and so forth.

This will be my journal of events. It may or may not be kept up regularly. Eventually, I hope to begin drawing, etc. Inshallah = God Willing.

October 2, 1986
The souq. There are five of us, in black abayas, walking the roadway into Taif for shopping. I say roadway, although we pretty much keep to the sidewalks, except that the trees, being planted in the middle of the sidewalks, make it impossible to walk unimpeded. Between ducking and stepping off the curb to manoeuvre around planted vegetation, it would be easier to walk the roadways – if it wasn't for the drivers.

Janet is easily frustrated, with a British volatility that she keeps restricted and controlled. Her face bursts into sunshine with a smile or laughter but fades to invisibility in repose. Gassia, who has lived in the middle east, both as a child in Syria and as a British nurse as an adult, is by far the most aware one here, with her knowledge of Arabic language and her understanding of middle eastern customs. She is a fighter in every sense of the word. She can spit and swear while making it seem appropriate and feminine. She bubbles over with life and laughter. If there were a party, she would be the first one to dance with a lampshade on her head – and that before any drinking had begun. Maggie met us enroute to the souq. She's also from England, and is a spare, dreamy-eyed girl with loose brownish hair in an afro style and a little girl voice.

The souq fills a large area that is bound on its outside edge by main roadways. The narrow lanes within it allow for small vehicles to squeeze through certain areas. It is essentially a walking market-place – a maze. It will take awhile for my bewilderment to ease. The western influence is strong. Nail-polishes, beads, vegetables, breads, radios, cassette tapes – almost everything imaginable with no guarantees that something will be here tomorrow. There is a sense of semi-permanency to it – a bit like Brigadoon – maybe nothing will be here tomorrow.

The souq. It has a few stores of the type that recall Western orientation, but most of the marketplace consists of inter-woven lanes lined with produce stalls of one nature or another. There is no obvious pattern or organisation to it (no doubt I shall later learn to differentiate areas – there is section of perfumes/scents – a clothing area – plus areas that concentrate on jewellery or pots or scarves, etc.). It has the sense of a perpetual fairground. It would be easy to walk in circles for hours through the narrow lanes and high, rickety, half-decrepit sand-coloured buildings – and never see the same sight twice, becoming quite lost.

By midmorning I am overwhelmed and exhausted. It will take several trips before I begin to feel my way around comfortably. Gassia's arabic-fluency constantly startles the vendors and gives an easier access to everything. The souq opens early – around 0830 or 0900 – closes around noon and reopens around 1600, after the heat of the day (although lately, with afternoon clouds, the heat of the day has been in the morning – but it is a dry heat and quite tolerable due to Taif's elevation of several thousand feet about sea level).

We were back at the residence by 1300 where I laid down for awhile and afterwards wakened refreshed. Talking with Janet later, we explored dimensions of our different lives, and what led us to this place (a favourite topic of conversation for us newcomers). Later she showed me a nearby grocery-shopping market which turns out to be very well stocked. I bought a large wad of the thin Arabic pita bread.

The first inklings of the deviousness of social life here are showing. There is a party at the French Compound. Will we or won't we go? Pick-up will be on the corner to the west of the compound at 2030 (after dark – since darkness falls between 1800 and 1830). We will be driven to French Compound – wherever or whatever that means. Little else can be said in case it is overheard. Since there are six or more of us, who may show up on the corner at the given time, Gassia, Janet and I make an alternative plan of going into town for supper. So we shall see...

Darkness falls. Four of us, anonymous westerners in black abayas, casually descend the stairs of the residence. We walk nonchalantly up the dark drive, past the lights of the security, to the end of the compound and around the corner. When we appear, a man seated on a curbstone arises, waves into the distance and crosses the street. We walk on, not daring to see where he disappeared to. At the end of the block, a good quarter mile away, we can see, beneath the streetlights, the abayas of three who had left about four or five minutes ahead of us. Suddenly there is a land rover beside us with two men in the front. We crowd quickly into the back seat and are off, motioning the others to get into a similar vehicle parked ahead of us.

We are off, into the night, twisting and turning through the crazy streets of Taif, but never actually leaving the town. A security guard waves us down near the entrance to the French Compound. An intense conversation in French demands the presentation of egamas of those in the front seat, and someone asks if one of us in the back is a wife to one of the two men in the front. (I have a sense of momentary panic, since I have not yet been issued with an egama.) Only married couples are permitted to escort unmarried females. Somehow, the men in the front bullshit their way through this questioning and we drive on until we are suddenly disembarking and entering a bungalow of men, women, and music.

Most of the women are English speaking only, while the men are French speaking only. Conversation are limited, but wine flows freely and dancing begins to pick up. The other vehicle, the one that had left ahead of us, arrives. Someone talks of being followed and having to go a circuitous route. Between laughter, dancing, food and wine the party carries on in a peculiar atmosphere of single words and smiles and movement – until around 2330 when three of us play the Cinderella act. We choose to return to the compound although some choose to stay overnight – non-threatening accommodation being provided to permit late hours. A slow/fast drive back finds no security checks, and we are eventually dropped off, walking slowly back to our compound entrance, past Rehab security and up to our rooms. Fini.

October 18,1986
A workday worth forgetting. I returned to my room feeling zapped of energy but got talked into attending the farewell party being held for Gordon – the Physiotherapy Head who resigned after political manipulations which resulted in his demotion to the Rehabilitation Centre. I saw a couple of dozen half-familiar faces there – all foreigners. In KSA (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) you are either a Saudi or a foreigner. I also had a good chat with Rosemary Grant, the wife of Dr Richard Grant – one of the Rehab doctors. I suspect we shall meet again. I then left early to get a good night's sleep for tomorrow. Today had undertones of depression to it. I shall have to remember that the word ‘Rehab’ is a synonym for ‘nursing home’ in this place.

October 19,1986
The Filipinos. They are in this country because there is neither enough work nor money for them in their own country. The Saudis somehow get away with paying them less and making them work more without the benefits of overtime pay. Financially, there are those here who become prostitutes for extra money. The Saudis also bribe them for any information that can be passed on about the Westerners, concerning parties, etc. Housekeeping staff are paid as little as 500 Saudi riyals per month. That is the Canadian equivalent of 200 dollars per month. Filipino staff nurses earn 1300 riyals per month as compared to my wage of 5000 riyals a month.

Effectively, the Filipino staff members are the working backbone of many institutions here (being used as cheap labour in much the same way as Canadians used Chinese immigrants in the earlier part of this century) and the restrictions on them are much more strictly enforced. The

threat of losing their job, for real or for scapegoat reasons, is omnipresent, thus they become a community apart. They are great people to work with, since theirs is a community/communal spirit. The communal spirit seems to be their strength, their support and their security. Singly, their sense of individuality/ personal power seems to be lacking.

They are in a position of servitude, and the Saudis tend to use that to their (the Saudis) benefit wherever and whenever they can. By the same token the Filipinos tend to search for someone else (i.e. a Westerner) who will stand up for them as a spokesman. They do not seem to realize the force they are within this country. Their greatest strength is their numbers. If they can effectively form a mass movement, they would find that they are workers of this country but to do so would mean releasing their belief in themselves as being used – as being helpless. Their sense of helplessness is consistently reinforced every time someone gets terminated for an arbitrary reason so it's a vicious circle.

In the end, others cannot fight their battles for them because that would not only reinforce the idea that they lack power but would mean any success would disappear as soon as their spokesman did. Westerners can only be an example of individual awareness, so that, by being true to themselves and their ideals/beliefs in fair treatment and honesty, they can be supportive to the Filipinos. I can only be myself and only make a strong statement if I am in some way involved in the issue, which means being as honest as I can according to my own self and own beliefs.

October 20, 1986
Tonight there was a meeting of the local British divers club. I am seriously considering joining the snorkelling side of it. The outings to the beach at Jeddah would be worth it.

October 21, 1986
I was wrong. The Filipinos are very aware of their strength in a backwards fashion. If any suggestions, put by western nursing staff are instituted without their (the Filipino's) internal agreement, then the suggestion quite simply gets forgotten/ nullified/ erased... finished. When people have no power in one direction, they find another way to give themselves a feeling of power.

October 22, 1986
Today was a bad day. I must forget that I have worked Rehab in Canada and remind myself again that this place is a totally different experience. As Janet puts it, I am being paid to live with a lot of bickering and bullshit – except that I hate to insult bulls by such a reference. I had an evening with the divers' novice group which included half-way hysteria with the laughter that carried the evening. Otherwise it would have been tears.

Thursday, October 23, 1986
The end of a day. I have Friday off this week and am then back to work. I plan to confront Paddy-Jane Gadsden on Saturday for a few statistics. Paddy-Jane is the plump, blond, young, superficially benign person – about 30 years old I think – who is the Director of Nursing at Rehab. She has become Muslim during her time here. Her active nursing background is limited. She achieved her current position by staying at a time when all the other Westerners were leaving. She has been referred to, by one of the Muslim workers here, as 'a snake in the grass'.

No one that I've spoken to at Al Hada or Rehab knows what constitutes overtime and what constitutes regular time (i.e. forty-eight hours per week). Everyone is slated to work eighteen

twelve-hour shifts next month – with an average of 216 working hours and twelve days off. It seems that this situation arises from the way that the monthly rosters are made out.

If the beginning of the month has four days of a week on it, these are slated as working days for all staff, without reference to the previous month.

If the last week of the month has five days in it, everyone will always work for four shifts (48 hours) on that roster, without the next month being taken into account. Then, in the next month, everyone will work for the first 2 days of the week with no reference to previous month.

When the two rosters are placed side by side, it gives 6 working shifts to that particular week. In this way, they get extra shifts out of staff, without having to pay overtime. This has evidently been going on for some time – since the bulk of western nursing staff left, leaving only a few.

Friday, October 24, 1986
Today was a good day as I've somewhat recuperated from my days of working, but nightfall finds me sleepless and crying. I am not a nurse. I do not want to be a nurse. I hate nursing. My basic feelings have not changed in the past ten years. Yet curiously enough, I do not feel that it is a mistake to have come here; rather, that this is a necessary stepping stone. A stepping stone to what, I am not yet sure, but I hope it comes before too long, or else I shall call it quits. I can live with the peculiarities of the Saudis and the country – but not with the nursing. As a profession it eats me away from the inside out. There seems to be an essential fundamental wrongness about it somewhere. That sense of wrongness in me, disturbs my whole equilibrium. I have come too far ahead over these past few years to start moving backwards.

The time to move on from here does not feel right yet – but it will come.

October 25, 1986
The short meeting I had with Paddy resulted in little or no actual information. If I do not want to work more than 16 or 17 shifts per month, all I need to do is request it in the request book. There seems to be a strangeness about this, but I shall request my regular 48-hour week and see what happens.

I had a touch of diarrhoea today. Not too bad – just enough to tire me beyond caring about the place. At least it focuses my thoughts on things other than work. I cannot even write poetry these days, let alone sketch.

October 26, 1986
I feel myself drawing inwards, like a flower folding up for nightfall. I cannot explain it, only feel it. It is time to take time off. Time to bury myself in the depths that only solitude can offer which allows the torment of work to ease by degrees.

Today I broke a mirror; spilled a container of needles over the medication tray, counter and floor; restarted two interstitial IVs on the same patient; then went to take blood cultures on a patient who refused to have the procedure done (which was no real worry since it the order was written up by an over-reactive doctor in response to a low-grade fever of an hour's duration).

I visited the souq for a few hours tonight. I'm gradually getting a feel for the place, but as yet, no urge to buy anything beyond basics of food, soap etc.

October 27, 1986
There was a dive meeting tonight. I also picked up my egama today, which prepares me for outward trip, although the dive meeting proved that there is little there to depend on regarding trips to Jeddah, or the like. It would scarcely be worth spending the money for possible weekends away once a month, with no guarantees of a return trip. My interest in that direction is fast vanishing. It is not worth the hassles or the disappointments.

October 28, 1986
Today, Gassia phoned her friend Peter. She arranged that, on Wednesday (tomorrow) evening, we will catch the bus to Jeddah and stay with him for a complete get-away. I received my travel permit, and I am suddenly confronted with three days off after working six of the past seven days. It feels a bit like flying into a moonlit sky with the wind as a carriage.

November 1, 1986
On the 29th, Gassia and I caught the evening bus from Al Hada to Jeddah. It was a night trip which didn't allow for much sight-seeing. Hitting the warm blast of muggy, lovely, thick air in Jeddah at the Kaki hotel was a treat. We were met by Gassia's friend, Peter – a tall, spare man in his early forties, with an easy smile and easy chatter. His wife and two children live in England and are due to arrive near the end of the month. Gassia appears to be a long-term friend with Peter's wife being a friend of hers since nursing training.

Between the shops of Jeddah (both modern and old) and a long afternoon snorkelling and sun-bathing on the Red Sea, the weekend was a touch of paradise. It is impossible to describe the sense of swimming in the Red Sea while watching brightly coloured fish dart in and out of coral with clams opening a startling blue towards one's eyes. It felt like entering a Technicolor movie world. Despite my blurred distance vision and memories of picture books, the reality is much, much more overwhelming than I had expected, even without a properly fitting mask. Peter's hospitality was like being brought back to the land of the living again.

Friday midnight saw Gassia and I again at the Kaki hotel. The long bus trip back included a typical egama check at 0200. We arrived in Taif by 0300 with another half hour in a taxi getting us back to Rehab. By 0500 I closed my eyes for long enough to get up for work at 0630. One treat that I returned with is my Jeddah purchase of a short-wave radio/cassette. I need the mind escape of music.

Today I was one of the few westerners working in Rehab. I felt like an outsider, accomplishing nothing more than the presence of a pair of hands and an interference to Filipinos' smooth running of events. Over-tiredness leads to over-reaction. Being back at work reignites my inner question of *what's the point*? There was nowhere to go to find a few private moments at break today. Westerners are resented for the difference in pay scale. Nursing staff seem to be considered the ‘servant’ support to the handicapped Saudis – on a minimum benefit package. So much more could be said about the magic of the past few days and the torment of today in comparison but perhaps it is best left unsaid as I am tired and need to sleep. It is good to have my cassette player with some music to drown out the street traffic and honking horns.

On another hand – there is nowhere I can think of as an alternative to being here. I am not sure where or when I will find my painting/ drawing space. I must place it in my mind, knowing it waits for me: painting, sketching, writing and the inner travels that go with it. Closing my eyes for a moment today, there was a sense of being so close to something fantastic on an inward scale, that I know I am meant to be here right now. I do wish I could clarify some of the whys and what-fors that I sense within. There is no outward substance to support these feelings.

November 2, 1986
I awakened fully into the symptoms of a head and chest cold this morning, so I asked Gassia to put me down for sick. I also told her I was damned if I was going over to outpatients to get a doctor to witness the fact that I have a cold (which means I get no sick pay for the day – big deal). I've slept almost 20 of the past 24 hours and am ready for more.

November 3, 1986
It was in Jeddah that I saw my first camel: a curious gangly creature, carrying two children who perched precariously on its hump. How narrow a life the Saudis ask us to live on these compounds, cloistering us from the fullness of that is within this country. It is as if they are ashamed of what they have to offer, although it is probably the Westerners that they are ashamed of. The sultan's palace is part way up the hill enroute to Al Hada. His less-respectful name around here is 'Prince Johnny Walker'. It is said that his liver would do any detoxification centre proud to admit him to their lists.

My cold does not improve, but with the prospect of two more days off before work, the worst of it should have passed by then. Poetry and drawing are non-existent these day with time and energy sadly lacking. If I am to persist here – I must find my way back to them.

It just hit me – the decadence of which the Saudis are so afraid has already hit them full force. They are so much more susceptible to decadence, having suddenly been flooded with unimaginable wealth to be thrown around. For the average Saudi, to work with the intensity and steadiness of the average Westerner is almost unimaginable. The Saudis appear to put in long hours of emptiness interspersed by slow paced accomplishments. Similar workers exist in the western countries, like various union-supported jobs that tend to support poor workers at the expense of good workers. There is a lot of government subsidy available to them for minimal work. It is the foreigners who appear to maintain this country in a somewhat modern format. The Saudis put in a good face – even to the photos of Saudi pilots flying planes – which I have heard are taken of a smiling Saudi in the pilot's seat after a Westerner has landed the craft. It is difficult to separate truth from reality – but there is encouragement for Saudis to fill positions even though their capability in the given position would not be acceptable in a Western country.

The decadence that the Saudis fear from Westerners is already eating the country away – rotting it from the inside out. They impression I get is that they think they can buy everything, as opposed to earning it. On the other hand, there is a sense of truth and honesty apparent among those Bedouins living as they have for centuries – at terms with the desert, family, and perpetual life/death survival patterns. By our terms the desert Bedouin is a harsh existence in many ways, yet one that demands the most of the individual whereas the sudden ease and luxury of this new and often idle middle-class is, by contrast, a false front – hence decadence.

This is a country ripe for fanaticism to take over. Earlier tonight, I heard about thirty-five British people being sent home from Riyadh, due to possession of alcohol at a party similar to those that have been happening for years. I also heard talk about the idea of creating separate souqs for men and women. Already there are many shops that do not permit women to enter. The present King is evidently considered liberal – but the Crown Prince, Abdullah, is said to come from a far more religious and restrictive viewpoint. The whole thing stinks of power-struggles in government that leave the current position of Westerners here, tenuous at best.

My cold is acting up tonight. I'm feeling feverish and thick-headed, so must direct myself to bed and hope for some recuperative sleep. What a shitty way to spend my time off.

November 4,1986
'Winter' is coming on. The men's white, almost see-through cotton thobes are gradually being replaced by heavier brown, grey, pale green and beige ones. Many are pin-striped with a lighter colour. It is ironic – the degree to which women must be covered when men wear light-weight white summer garments. With the sun behind them, little is hidden, and with their pubic-shaving habits, men are frequently seen scratching the groin area. They are also seen walking about with their thobes held above the knees – not to mention relieving themselves in corners of the street, regardless of passers-by.

Men are frequently seen holding hands with one another and kissing one another on meeting – yet never holding hands or showing any visible demonstration of emotion towards the wives, who walk black-hooded, face-hidden, a few paces behind them. The women who wear veils which reveal the eyes are not of Saudi origin – but more likely to be from Egypt, the Sudan, or some other Muslim country. The faces Saudi women are always covered with black veil, and some even believe all visible skin must be hidden, which includes wearing black gloves to hide their hands.

Girls begin to cover up around the age of ten or twelve (puberty). All the hair is covered when they are young, and at first menstruation, the whole face is covered. It is a coming-of-age which a young girl looks forward to with great excitement, as donning the black veil means that she has become a woman. Younger girls are dressed like dolls in frills and tulle, with shiny princess gowns, often edged in gold lace with ribbons and beads.

I had late-night chat with Gassia, Pauline, Ingrid, Janet, myself, which lasted into the wee hours of the morning – about metaphysics, why's, auras and spirits. I could sense a circle of energy wrapping us and strengthening us as we spoke. It is like the beginnings of something – undercurrents that are pushing to the surface through this group. I'll note more details about Pauline and Ingrid later.

November 5, 1986
I wakened this morning with a strong sense of my time here being limited in terms of months – maybe six or seven.

When walking into Taif today with Ingrid, Janet and Gassia, I kept getting flashes akin to streets of blood and revolution. Revolution against what, I am not sure. This place is like a volcano waiting to erupt.

Ingrid is attractive, fair-skinned, of Dutch/German heritage and brought up in England. She has worked in Saudi over five years, after dropping a marriage that had frozen up. Her salary from Saudi has allowed her two daughters to attend public school during that time, and working in this country seems to have been a move that reawakened life in her after a long spell of stasis. There is a calmness and fluidity about her that could be placed in any company, yet another side to her that flusters easily. She has a clear, clean laugh.

Pauline could put many comediennes to shame. She is a natural with stories and accents with a *joie-de-vie* bubbling from within. As an occupational therapist she wins patients over with a laugh and a joke. She can tell them off with laughter, so that the message is received with so much fun, it scarcely seems to be telling off. One of the old Yemeni patients (having had a stroke about two years ago), through an interpreter, offered fifty thousand riyals for her – ten of which she would be allowed to keep – if she would marry him. Evidently, he wants children with yellow

hair and red faces. With a wink and laugh she said she had her eye on someone else, which started a round of laughter and arguments in the Occupational Therapy department. She figured the Yemeni fellow wouldn't be impressed with her hysterectomy of eight years ago.

While walking to town, Gassia translated some of the comments she could hear from the Saudi men we passed. They spoke loudly enough, figuring all of us to be ignorant of Arabic. Their tone of voice and attitude already gave some indication of the nature of their side comments – things like *'fucking cunts', 'hey, that one looks young enough for you, you go for it',* etc.

The religious fanatics quite literally hate the westerners. Should a religious coup of some kind occur, all westerners would be well advised to exit the country immediately if they valued their lives.

I heard today that the King's title has been altered – to make him the equivalent of the Muslim religious head as well as the political head – both King and Pope-equivalent. It makes him total ruler of everything and everyone.

November 6, 1986
I'm gradually coming to terms with the work conditions and managing to keep myself at a level so that I can deal with it. To get a roll of toilet paper replaced in any of the toilets at work we must keep the inside of the finished roll to hand in, thus proving that one has been finished. Invariably washrooms have no toilet paper. About a dozen paper towels are put in given paper towel container to last all day, with about an inch of soap in the soap pump and no disinfectant. There is a perpetual stink of urine in the bathrooms, with urine bottles and condoms (uridoms) etc. reused to point of filth. Sterile procedures must be done with unsterile items because that's all there is. Urinary infections are rampant. No need to comment on the problems of cleaning up patients on evening shift, after the bowel programs are followed through.

November 7, 1986
Kate Camerelli has returned from holidays. She actually came back the same night that Gassia and I returned from Jeddah. Between those two there is a personality clash that would put a deep freeze to shame.

There's another resident of the floor I have only mentioned in passing: Pam Harris, a Canadian from Toronto. She is the head of the Occupational Therapy Department, and her room is next to mine. She has a warm brown cast to her skin, but I am not sure of her exact heritage. Her black hair is usually tied back in a bun near the nape of her neck, and severely pulled back from a narrow, aristocratic face. She has high cheekbones and a roman nose, and a tendency to look downwards from half-closed eyes, with her head tilted slightly back. Tall and thin, her voice is modulated presenting a coolness permits no closeness. She carries distance with her, and in conversation overrides the opinions of everyone else, as if it she who is the final authority. Even her laughter rings with a coolness that pushes people away. I do not know how much is intentional or how much is habit, but there is a sense of ruthlessness to her ambitions. She walks like a shadow on the outside edge of others on the floor, offering nothing, but freely offering her presence if there is a get-together of pot-luck food.

The only other person with a room on the second floor is Evan. She is petite, with a triangular elfin face and large dark eyes. She is a Filipino registered nurse, who has become somewhat isolated from the others. I do not know her full story, but she is very intelligent and seems to have a broad-minded awareness of the Westerners position and difficulties, that are of a

different nature to those that the Filipinos experience. She's also been a great help in teaching me the 'ropes' when it comes to functioning as a registered nurse in Rehab.

I was talking with Gassia tonight, and she said the King has been name Imam/Keeper of the Two Holy Shrines or some such religious title. She also said she wouldn't give a fig for Christian lives should there be a religious revolution. The King's new title is really an old one, reawakened from a bloodier, by-gone time.

November 8, 1986
There's more underground talk: evidently security has started following everyone who leaves the compounds. Dolores, the Irish nurse, was followed. She returned from days off with her boyfriend from the French compound, and when she got out of the car, a waiting security pulled him over to ask questions. The physio staff are also being pressured, with the women being followed after they have finished work – wherever they go, whether to the souq or for a walk etc. Supposedly this always happens to a greater degree when Christmas nears, but there is the sense that a 'bust' of some kind is about to take place.

November 9, 1986
Curious undertones are beginning to make themselves known. I had a visit from Kate, who came into the room where Janet and I were talking. It seems that she is not only a desperately unhappy person, but also one who allows others to put the effort into carrying conversation and buoyancy. A somewhat parasitic personality who draws from others without putting back. It made for a tiring evening.

November 10, 1986
Today was pay-day, and the first actual cash was deposited to my Guernsey Island Account, so I actually feel as if I have a bounce of cash again. I enjoyed that feeling, which led to a great evening at the souq with Pauline and Ingrid where I actually bought a few fun, luxury items: two bangle-bracelets of Bedouin silver and some oil-scent.

Also, Pam Harris has, between last night and today, almost tried to pressure Janet and myself into going to one of the parties this weekend. I had already told Kevin, the Irish nurse at work, that I'd work half a day for him, so cancelled out. It is as if there is a wish of some of the higher-ups (Paddy/Kate/Pam Harris) to try and break up the union that links Gassia, Janet, myself and others on this floor – but once common minds have met, it takes more than all their intent to unsettle such a unity. I wonder what the next action will be? I sense they are looking for some kind of a hold by which to manipulate us in the way they have so long manipulated the Filipinos. Pam Harris has spoken more direct words to me in the past two days than in the past seven weeks.

November 11, 1986
More politics are happening at work. After Janet and I stated we would not work 'involuntary' overtime without getting overtime pay for it, and since Rehab is supposed to be 'properly staffed', they refuse to pay out overtime pay for anyone who works more than 48 hours a week, although they will pay regular hourly wages (i.e. a person can work extra hours, but they will not be paid overtime wages which, at Al Hada, means being paid time and a half or regular wages with 50% bonus per hour). A memo has come out say that no one is required to work overtime and need only say so, but if they wish to work more time it must first be approved. It is a peculiarly worded memo, that holds an undertone indicating, that if an individual refuses to work the hours needed at Rehab, they will not be permitted to work overtime at Al Hada, where

overtime pay is properly credited. This is mainly aimed at the Filipinos, so that the extra hours they are scheduled to work at Rehab must be worked if they wish to work extra at Al Hada.

An interesting aside: the total number of westerners expelled from the Riyadh drinking issue was 43 at last count. Meanwhile, here the number of shops women are not permitted to enter is still increasing. We must stand across the street from the shop in some places, if there is something inside that we want (noting that, in the souq, ‘across the street’ means standing across a narrow laneway, so bargaining is still welcomed by anxious vendors).

November 12,1986
The latest rumour has it that sixty British workers have been deported from Jeddah after the Riyadh debacle, but as yet, the story has no factual basis that we can confirm.

‘*Outoot’*... the Tagalog word for ‘fart’. Between beans, peas, chilli, curry, onions, garlic etc., it is a major topic of conversation, including degree of potency, audibility, frequency, flavour, intensity, etc.

To put a new slant on wind currents – Janet, Gassia and I went out to the local fish/ chicken/ chip corner 'cafe'. We were the only women to sit there. Gassia's flexibility with the language makes ordering a breeze and it was a much-needed change of atmosphere – both physically and psychologically.

Some of the patients at work are referred to as SPO – sexually pre-occupied. One is Salem. When changing his condom or washing his penis/ groin area he starts breathing heavily, as if trying to will himself into an erection. Another old fellow, Amri is perpetually trying to give himself a hard-on, and his biggest worry is that he hasn't had sex with his wife for a long time. Sexual activity seems to be a top priority when it comes to the Saudi sense of honour/ respect/ wholeness, etc. Patients go out of their way to show-off to the nurses.

November 14, 1986
I have a whole day off, after working seven of the last eight. That will give me a chance to swim in the outside pool on the compound, maybe try a sketch, go to the souq, talk, smoke, laugh. Ingrid returned from a weekend in Jeddah, hearing nothing of the supposed sixty deportees from there. Perhaps it's all rumour.

Further clarification of the Riyadh situation: Originally there had been a party going on at one of the villas involving some thirty-five people (westerners). The city Mutawas (religious police) had been watching this villa for some time, as a lot of parties went on there. On this particular night, a girl, who had only been in the country a couple of weeks, answered the door when the Mutawas knocked. She let them in and they began to arrest the whole lot (both booze and parties involving male and female unmarrieds being strictly against the religious code). Hospital security was called in, and they managed to persuade the Mutawas that they would deal with the affair and the whole incident was hushed up. Hospital security try to keep compound goings-on both limited and within the bounds of the compounds, so as not to intrude into the outer aspects of the community. A few weeks later, three of the women, whose names had been recorded at the party, were caught at another party raided by Mutawas. Seeing the same people, the Mutawas demanded to know why they hadn't been punished (it was a loss of face/ respect, since their original arrests had been negated). As a result, the thirty-five of the original fiasco plus those at the second were all sent home.

Pauline, Janet, Gassia and I visited one of the incense/ fragrance/ scent shops at the souq tonight. It looked like an outdoor corner stall. We looked across the crowded counter at the rows and rows of nameless numberless bottles on the wall behind – bottles, atomisers, vials, sprays, oils, perfumes, toilet waters. The incense section at the front held containers of what looked like bark chips, gravel and quartz, in shades of pinks, whites, browns; in chunks, lumps, bricks and sticks; with an incense burner perpetually going. The most beautiful fragrance emanated from it, but I don't know what it was called. Among other scents, we tried one of the most expensive of them. It was a rose oil, priced at 100 Riyals for half an ounce. The four of us, came home smelling like the shop.

November 15,1986
I have one more day off which makes two days off in row. After working eleven twelve-hour days, with only two single days off amongst them, it will be a treat.

I had strange dreams last night leaving me with residual fragments. In a room of many I was singled out for welcome. Another fragment involved three cats – one only a kitten, which I saw lying in a pail. I thought it had died and bent to stroke the softness of orange-white fur. It responded to my pats by wakening and I realized it had only been asleep. This last dream must reflect the fact that everywhere one goes, there are cats in varying stages of gauntness. They are half wild and half tame – always around people, but they are not pets (unless as does happen, a westerner adopts some sweet kitten from the streets). They are in the souqs, at the residence, at Al Hada and Rehab Centre. They feed on left-overs from the rubbish or left-overs thrown aside from passers-by or whatever. They are scrawny, diseased, deformed and pregnant – all wary of humans, yet always underfoot. With encouragement and patience some become quite friendly. Most are black and white, with some having a neat black swatch looking like a moustache under the nose.

I've been in a strange space all day. Old obsessions are being triggered through the nursing and am having difficulties in keeping myself in balance at times.

November 16, 1986
I'm back on target today, thank God, or Allah or whomever. I've also have had verification of some of our suspicions. Janet and I are to work night shift next month, but our schedules seem to have been worked out so that we have only four days off at the same time. Gassia is on day shift. Between Kate and Paddy there seems to have been a decision that our group must be split up. In Kate's words, she does not like 'cliques'. Our so-called 'clique' involves everyone except Kate, Paddy and Pam Harris, all of whom in themselves compose a 'clique' that is associated with those of higher income/position. They also associate more with the doctors and the doctors' wives.

I've not described Dolores properly yet. She's Irish and pretty with a softness about her as well as a sadness. The sadness is partly that which she carries with her from the past and is exaggerated after being ridden somewhat by Kate and Paddy over the past several months. She has been on night shifts more than anyone else, and deals with work as if it was a perpetual battle (how well I understand the feeling). Brown waving hair frames an elfin face of clear complexion – waif-like and almost too thin. A stubbornness has kept her working in almost total isolation except for the power of friendship that exists between Pauline and her – which is virtually the only support she has received in eleven months of working here. She also has a wandering eye, which she hopes to have fixed with what she manages to save while working here – although she has a difficult time saving money.

Why is there this vendetta to keep westerners fragmented and pressured? We are so few in this place. They must be desperately insecure down here and so need to prove their position of authority. Kevin has described similar actions against him. (Kevin, who I see occasionally, is the only male nurse working here; he lives at Al Hada and commutes by bus for work because there is no male compound at rehab – only the female compound and married quarters for the doctors.)

November 17, 1986
I had a strange, strange dream of a world entering the winter of an ice age, with people everywhere seeking escape; of ships sinking at sea and of people in exodus. Also of laser type beams being sent out to harm but being harmlessly drawn away by a strange power, temporarily conferred onto a human being. It was as if the human absorbed the power, with eyes turned inwards, and then returned the power to its source. The city exploded with images of Sodom and Gomorra. Of the survivors, it is those with children, and women in pregnancy who are to be protected for they are the seeds of a new race.

Kate Camerelli came to my room last evening, asking if I would mail a letter for her. Knowing within myself that I had to confront her with some of the things that had been occurring, I invited her in for coffee and the evening became a session of each of us trying to see where the other stood. Kate did not admit to fixing the schedules and did not deny it. She wanted specifics as to why the rift between westerners. I told her the only person I could speak for was myself, which limited my speaking about things that did not involve anyone else.

I suggested that any rift involved more than one side – that it involved communication breakdown on two sides. Her reaction was that she would never approach anyone else – they would have to approach her. From there things became more philosophical on my part and basically, I said that I was here to do my job as best I could, within the conditions imposed. So far as the petty rules went, I would not follow them. When I was at work, I was at work. When I was off, I was off. The end. Also that I might not be a person of many acquaintances, but I valued my friends intensely. I mentioned that, as a person, I did not yet know Kate. She tried to go into over-detail on the manipulations of the hospital in a historical sense, ending up with naming Tajaldeen as the most crooked individual on staff. (He is the Saudi who is the Assistant Administrator at Rehab.) When I said that the place stinks of someone pocketing money, again, she neither confirmed nor denied. At one-point Gassia knocked on the door to my room and indicated that I could drop in and see her after our conversation. I suspected it would not happen since Kate seemed determined to continue our conversation as long as possible. Just before Kate left at 0130, she commented "Well, you won't be able to drop in on Gassia now. I think she's gone to bed".

Her antipathy to Gassia showed. During our conversation I noticed that she could tell me how long Gassia had been in this country to the day. About the rest of us, she had a more generalised awareness (e.g. about five months or about five weeks). By the end of the evening we had an uneasy truce. It was good to get to bed.

After last night with Kate, today was a smashingly, good day today. Dolores dropped by about 1000, after which I played around with pencil sketches for about an hour or so. In our conversation I realized that Kate has certainly played mind games with Dolores and made life difficult during the past year. I met up with Janet around 1200. She had heard voices in my room earlier and thinking it was Kate (rather than Dolores), refused to knock. After a swim etc., the three of us headed down to the souq about 1700 and wandered about till after 2000 hours. We returned to meet up with Gassia. It seems the administrator of the hospital, Zahrani, a Saudi,

had approached her for a favour – asking her to teach his 16-year-old daughter English between 1800 and 2000 hours on her days off. Since it was a favour request, she is somewhat boxed in, but the hours mentioned appear to be a further attempt to separate our togetherness after work and on days off. After talking it over, the result is that she has the right to impose her conditions about the time of the teaching and if it does not meet with his favour, than that's his problem, since days off here are valuable and the are the only time she has for cleaning-up/ washing/ shopping /visiting etc. to be done in a relaxed atmosphere.

November 18,1986
I wrote a letter to Dad today. His last letter from Papua New Guinea spoke about *'dropping into Saudi Arabia for a visit'.* I let him know that if his passport is stamped with the Israeli visit, he plans to make in early 1987, he will never be allowed into the country. Plus the fact it borders between difficult and impossible for husbands to get wives and children over here for visit – and the likelihood of him visiting me here is completely unimaginable. Tourism is not permitted. To visit this country is to work here. I really don't know if I would be permitted to go out with him in public or private despite the fact that we are related, and I'm damned if I know where he would stay in Taif. There's no problem in Jeddah, but Taif isn't oriented towards foreign, western tourists.

Today was a slow, pleasant day today. Janet and I made supper for Gassia and Ingrid. Dolores was working and couldn't come and Pauline went out.

November 19. 1986
I woke up with a note under my door from Kate asking me to mail a letter and afterwards (i.e. after working) to drop in for coffee. She included Gassia and Janet in the invitation. Can she really be so daft as to think she can, on the one hand try and fragment us, and on the other become friends? Gassia went down to the souq. Janet and I spent a laid-back evening between catching up with odds and ends in our rooms and chatting with Dolores and later, Pauline. If Kate wanted a clique, she has certainly begun one.

I do look forwards to seeing Mavis again tomorrow. Just back from a month holiday in Britain, she is well aware of the undercurrents at work, having worked here for three to four years. She too, has hit a limit with this place and is resigning. Her three months notice will take her until February 14. Between her and her husband, there is much to keep her busy, especially with the art and jewellery that the two get involved in. A brief description: she is short, about forty, with blond hair and sleepy looking, large eyes. She has well-defined square features and an eccentric vocal approach to anything and everything with a low voice and deep, contagious laughter.

November 20, 1986
It was a treat to work with Mavis today. We got to talking about her brother (she is one of about 12 children) who disappeared from her life some 12 years ago, when the last letter from him in Australia reached her mother in England. Since then, she has traced him to Papua New Guinea. Evidently her sister saw him on a television programme about the time PNG was achieving independence. When the name Michael Pope was mentioned, the sister, who had not seen him since she was a child, nearly fell off her chair. His life has been that of a loner/ rover. He left England when he was 18 to work on a Norwegian ship – then spent many years in Australia and was traced to Papua New Guinea. At her latest guess, Mavis figures he is in the Solomon Islands. The difficulty in tracing him results from the fact that no official will release the information on a private person without their permission – although she did manage at one stage to get someone to admit to the fact that he was still alive. Since the television programme a few

years ago she has wanted to get in touch with him even more strongly. I must write to my father and ask if he's heard of the name. Evidently the fellow is an economist.

Friday, November 21, 1986
The last two days have been quite mellow while working with Kate as Supervisor. Alhumdillilah (praise be to God). I am exhausted though, and want to sleep.

November 22, 1986
There is talk of westerners being searched when travelling between Jeddah and Taif which leaves us with a sense of increased intolerance towards foreigners.

Regarding palmistry, Mavis has read the palms of many people in Rehab. She noted that Kate has the simian line across her right hand – which she says denotes ruthlessness and lack of conscience. She said that Pamela Harris's hand indicated selfishness. I wonder what she would say about mine? I have very nearly a simian line across my left palm created by a strong fork from the heart line.

Gassia, Pauline, Ingrid and I tried the Ouija board tonight. We came up with name of Gassia's uncle. A definite presence that seemed to be there, but also a lot of interference. We shall, I hope, try again.

November 23, 1986
Three of us went shopping today and checked out Ace Travel. Ingrid's holidays come up in January, and she must book her flight before long. I keep trying to figure out when to fit in holiday space but am held back within myself. When we all get talking, we always end up with the sense that we will try to finish our contracts if the opportunity and the situation permits. At the same time, we sense that for one reason or another, it might not be possible. By next month I shall be buying the first gifts for friends and family in Canada. By the beginning of January I shall buy some luggage to replace my broken suitcase. I suspect, by the time my annual leave arrives (if I am still here) I will leave with everything I need, in case I chose not to return. Meanwhile, there are letters to be written, and, with a bit of luck, a sketch perhaps.

I must remember the words that I said the other day – that there is a pattern being played out here. I am a part of that pattern. The unit (i.e. Gassia, Janet, Pauline, Dolores, Ingrid and me) is an aspect of the pattern. Pam H., Paddy, Kate (all Leos, curiously enough) are another aspect. The doctors (Tajaldeen, Mitchell, Grant) another; the Filipinos, another – and the Saudi patients, another. There are probably other fragments of which I am not aware. Between all, the living unit of Rehab is created. In this teaching, we are all parts of the whole, in which countless scenarios are being played out – like a continuous struggle of good and bad, right and wrong, weakness and strength, corruption and honesty. Each person is both himself/ herself and is part of the greater whole – thus forming the equivalent to a gestalt consciousness. So long as I feel myself to be a part of the pattern, I shall stay. But when I no longer feel the connections, the holds, the internal sense of commitments, and am being pulled elsewhere, then it will be time to leave.

November 24, 1986
It was a long day today, beginning with early morning light playing the rock hills in golden hues. There were three lanky pups running wild in the construction site that will become the new laundry and mosque at Rehab and on the ward, there was a spitting and biting reaction from a patient who did not get his own way. It was reminiscent of a sociopathic patient I dealt with at GF Strong Rehabilitation Centre some years ago. I have no tolerance for downright rudeness. I told him if he could not speak civilly, not to speak – at which point he began trying to hit out with his

arms as well as his limited ability would allow (a c5 – c6 quadriplegic). When I held his arms to prevent him striking, he tried biting. He has a psychic ability to control and manipulate which makes the Filipinos both fear and hate him. His rudeness and selfishness can anger me at direct moments, otherwise, he is not worth the energy of hating. I actually feel sorry for him.

November 25, 1986
Dr. Lewis is the new Medical Director of Rehab, completing the full complement of four doctors for the 91 patients.

Dr. Abdullah Mitchell is tall and white-haired, with a far away expression in his blue eyes: a gentle man who seems to be putting in time here, rather than one devoted to doctoring. He is keenly perceptive on the psychological aspect and is both British, and a Muslim.

Dr. Richard Grant is volatile, verbose, with pointed features, quick shifting brown eyes and thinning grey-brown hair. He is consistently expounding the faults of this place but lacking the nerve to stand up for that which he states.

Dr. Tony Saber is Lebanese with dark hair going bald. He has a round build bordering on podgy and evasive eyes that, when they do meet with others, are defiant. He seems insecure, demanding loudly to be noticed and admired for his unremarkable doctoring skills. He is perpetually trying to show up the other doctors and wants the social position to prove he must be better than everyone else. He was instrumental in getting the last medical director demoted so that he could resume the Acting Medical Director functions.

And back to Dr. Lewis who is an American, over six feet tall. He appears to have both white and Negro blood heritage and is a true bulldozer. Within the three weeks he has been here, he has got the Filipinos cooking for him, has overruled the other doctors' orders without their being consulted, and appeared on the wards last Friday garbed in full thobe, prayer cap and ghutra apparel. There is talk that he is considering becoming a Muslim. He obviously enjoys his status and wields it freely. So far, I have seen little to prove him an expert in the field of Rehabilitation. He is the only unmarried doctor of the lot.

November 26, 1986
The latest word on Dr. Lewis is that he has decided to become Muslim sometime in the next month. He says he has read half the Koran in the three weeks that he has been here. I have an uneasy feeling about the man, sensing he is not mentally stable.

His decision to turn Muslim seems less one of pondering and studying than it is one of trying to impress the Saudis. Something jars me when I have any contact with him.

November 27, 1986
Gassia, Pauline, Janet and I were talking about what it means to have a jail sentence in this country. Those who are deported get off lightly. Gassia cited an instance of a Sudanese woman in Yambou (where Gassia once worked for two years). The woman had been accused of stealing jewellery and was sentenced to have her right hand cut off. Because she was pregnant, the doctors got the sentence suspended for health reasons. The woman was then jailed with regular check ups at the Yambou hospital. Every time she came in for a check-up, she had massive vaginal infections and would need to be hospitalised with antibiotics. She was being regularly 'knocked up'. This woman was both Muslim and Arab – so there is no telling what hope a western Christian woman would have in such a place.

Janet mentioned a story she had heard from a friend who worked in Saudi for many years. A young girl either 14 or 16 years old was on the maternity ward having been impregnated by her brother. They were trying to get her out of the country, because if she returned to her family, she would be stoned to death (as punishment for having become pregnant out of wedlock). They did not manage to get her out of the country, and no one knows what happened after her discharge home.

Friday, November 28, 1986
It's Friday today; holy day, and a day off. Through Janet and Gassia, I heard that Dr. Fred Lewis was again in full gear on the ward – ghutra/ prayer cap/ thobe, etc. I also heard a few other details that confirm my earlier suspicions about him being some kind of con artist. He was heard telling a Saudi patient, a quadriplegic of several years, that if he (the patient) prayed the required five times a day, the benevolent Allah would heal him, Inshallah. Evidently this is what he is going around telling all the patients.

Gassia attended when Dr. Lewis took the Psychologist, who was complaining of back pain, to the outpatient department, and injected him with almost six cc's of xylocaine (using an intra-muscular syringe) into both of his upper, outer ear ridges. Dr. Lewis claimed it was a new form of acupuncture. He then let the man leave immediately, without any kind of waiting spell. It is to be noted that this occurred after Dr. Lewis made the back pain worse in the first place – by attempting some semi-chiropractic experiments on the man's back the other day. This doctor is dangerous.

November 29, 1986
The latest word is that Dr. Lewis is now being congratulated on his decision to become Muslim. He sits in the lobby of the Rehabilitation Centre with a book of Arabic writing in his hands yet cannot speak or read the language. Impressions appear to be all important to him. Megalomania?

After tomorrow, I start night shifts for the month of December. I think I shall try for as many months of nights as I can manage during the coming year, as it will minimise some of the bullshit I need to contend with in this place (which is no reference to the perpetual bowel programmes that need to be dealt with).

November 30, 1986
I heard Dr. Lewis explaining that he only wears his thobe and ghutra during early morning prayer – between five and eight in the morning. Then, on his way back from the mosque where he prays, he drops into the Rehab Centre before returning to his apartment unit to change for work by nine.

It was a strange day at work. Pauline is just back after a virus that held her low for about five days. Gassia has been unwell with some kind of gastritis since yesterday afternoon. Janet went off sick with an ear infection that keeps her laid-up with dizziness.

Janet was laughing yesterday, when describing a nurse she once knew, who was fairly shy, and giving a bed bath to a male patient, saying '*I'll wash as far down as possible, and as far up as possible, but you'll have to wash possible.*' Janet figured that someone like that certainly wouldn't last long here.

Mail galore arrived today after a long spell of very little. It seems that there has been a mail strike in Canada. I must begin letter writing again. There are five or six letters already beginning to write themselves in my mind.

December 1, 1986
Gassia is still off sick. She figures it's a virus and has cooked up a curry, hot enough to burn the skin off a rabbit from the inside out. Dr. Grant seems to figure it's something more – query appendicitis – and did a full examination this morning. It is not permissible to be sick here until one has gone and been checked out by the doctor – otherwise no pay. I suspect that Gassia is closer to the truth of her illness than the doctor. The flu bug has been biting everyone here in one way or another. So far, inshallah, I remain well. After hearing of Gassia's experience in receiving a rectal examination, plus several stabs with a needle in the need for a blood test – and then being told to return six hours later (a walk of about fifteen minutes from the Residence to the Rehab Outpatients Office, which is a long way when one is unwell) – it is not a place to be sick. This place really seems to offer its share of both stupidity and insult. We are not the Arabs searching miracles from these 'gods' of modern medicine.

I walked into Taif today with Ingrid. All the houses – or perhaps ‘villas’ is a better word – have a small space of concrete yard in front of them. This is surrounded by a six-to-eight-foot wall that also surrounds the house. No windows on the lower floors are seen open. Women are not to be seen unveiled, even from within their own homes. Some of the three-and-four-story villas are separated from each other by sheets of plastic or corrugated metal to insure privacy from other eyes. Any windows that are present tend to be very tiny. Some are completely covered in a lattice work of woven wood that is a beautiful art form – but which is often stuck with unfinished edges onto adobe-like flat yellowed walls. Doors/ gateways are metal or wooden barricades, frequently padlocked, which lead towards another set of doors, which lead to the house. Many children are protected from the sun so as to keep their skin as pale as possible. Rickets, from lack of sunshine, is not uncommon to see in youngsters in this sun-burnt country.

1730. Gassia awakens, looking much improved and swearing a blue streak at the idiocies of the doctors. She meets with full agreement from all of us who have seen the doctors in their daily meanderings. They are like children looking for a chance to impress.

December 2, 1986
My brother’s birthday – Happy Birthday Dave.

The Al Hada Hospital and Rehabilitation Centre is run under the auspices of MODA (Ministry of Defence and Aviation) and thus serves a largely military personnel (plus extended family), a bit like a veterans' hospital. The Rehab Centre is located right beside the training field, and to go or return from working in the morning is to see the army in action. Evidently joining the army offers a secure meal ticket – but does not seem to hold the allure of any noble or patriotic ambition. Some Saudis drive out here in their thobe/ ghutra attire, then, out of sight from friends and family they park around the corner from the Rehab Centre/Military base, where they jump out of their cars, do a quick change into uniform and shuffle into their day's training gear – khaki trousers and shirt and a matching cap with front brim.

We frequently watch them in their daily training, looking like a class of primary school children playing an erratic game of follow the leader. Instead of the high-step march, there is a slouched shuffle. Push-ups are a grunt of raised heads and shoulders from prone position. Marching is an uneven row of mismatched arms and steps. Occasionally two or three men form a band with drums and bagpipes playing off-key tunes, while the shaggy troop wavers back and forth in

left/right pairs around the field. At day's end (mid-afternoon), they meander back across the street for a quick change back into thobe and ghutra before diving into their vehicles and racing away. The uniform slouch is chronic. To work for a meal ticket does not appear to be a matter of pride or self-worth. When watching them there is an uncanny, unsettling feeling of children playing war games with real guns.

December 3, 1986
Kate was the supervisor during last night's night shift. I met Dolores for coffee, and later Kate popped into the little room we were sitting in. I feel sorry for Kate. She does not realize how her manipulation of others isolates her. She wonders why she is not sought out for conversations. Where there is a problem of personalities or of being avoided as she is, the first person one to which one must look to for answers, is oneself. If unwilling to make changes within the self, one must at least learn to recognize the way in which the self has helped to create/ perceive /perpetuate the existing reality.

The harshness of this country is intimately reflected in a harshness of the attitude in the people. There is a sense of intolerance – as the blaring, steady sun is intolerant. The softness that rain and greenery brings to a place seems to be reflected more in the people of the more temperate climates. One patient from Male II, Salem, a quadriplegic, who went home on a weekend pass in his electric wheelchair was stoned by the children there. Weakness is not accepted. Deformity is not tolerated. The attitude reflects fear and ignorance. This is, of course, a broad generalisation.

December 4, 1986
Dr. Fred Lewis has now requested that he be called by the Muslim name he has chosen. Ibrahim Abdu something or other. 'Dr. Lewis' is how I think of him and what I shall call him.

Dolores went out to meet with Serge, her boyfriend from the French compound, whom she has been seeing steadily for quite a while now. She was watched getting into the car with Serge and the car was followed, so she got out at one of the shopping centres in Taif and told Serge that if he wasn't there when she came out of the store, she'd head back to Rehab. While she was shopping, she sensed a plain clothed policeman following her about. When she finished shopping and went outside, Serge was no longer around. The car that had been following them was parked in the parking lot. She went to the pay telephone to make a call. Afterwards, a policeman came up and asked in perfect, courteous English, if she was finished so he could use the telephone. She said, 'no problem', at which point, a woman, the wife of a man known to her from the travel agency in town, came up and asked if she wanted a lift back to Rehab. Dolores accepted and ended up back here about an hour after she'd left. The couple had sensed she was in difficulty and had come to her rescue. The black car with the policeman followed them back to Rehab.

We heard that Al Hada has had a raid. The police/ security broke into rooms while the occupants were out, searching for booze. Evidently, they had a hit list compiled from their spy network. The Christmas pinch is definitely in full swing, but because Al Hada hospital is already understaffed by about forty-five people, and it is said that westerners who transgress will only get warnings. Filipinos will be deported.

Friday, December 5, 1986
Morning prayer call. It’s just after 0500 hours. The callers of the various mosques, all on their megaphones, sound like they are in competition with one another, echoing like banshees through the hills.

It is cold these days. Colder than usual, from all the information I receive. Saudis walk with their ghutra ends tied up around the face, muffler style, and wear warm jackets over their thobes. Compared to months of intense sun, this must feel like a deep freeze to them. With no central heating of any kind, I shall be putting my sleeping bag on the bed for extra warmth. I hear that the puddles have frozen over up at Al Hada, although the sun quickly melts them after sunrise.

December 6, 1986
I seem to have caught the flu bug or whatever. Even a day and night in bed isn't helping me to feel too spry. What a drag.

December 7, 1986
It was minus 4 degrees Celsius (frost weather) yesterday morning. I did not come prepared for this type of weather. I went to the doctor after a night of feeling feverish at work, so that he could confirm I had a fever and give me a sick note. The doctor decided I had an upper respiratory tract infection. I don't care whether it was the flu or a URTI.

I slept nine hours without moving and woke to find a letter from Anne Rayvals had been pushed under my door. Her news from Canada, was that she had won first prize for a short story she had written. I wished I could phone her and congratulate her. I feel divorced from both writing and painting these days but shall use it as a future focus.

Islam: it is so wrapped up in politics, that it is both the strength and the weakness of this country. To speak against the religion is to speak against the King. To be a devotee is to be a devotee to the political system. There is a chronic fear of the power of the Mutawas, the religious police, enforcing the man-made laws of Allah. The king is the equivalent to the pope – Allah's representative on earth. The result is one of a peculiar political/ religious fervour that bears little outward resemblance to true spirituality. (Perhaps this is not so peculiar, when looking backwards through the history of Christianity and politics.) Living day by day in an atmosphere where one must pray five times a day (and I have seen the Mutawas with sticks stopping cars in the streets, herding recalcitrant individuals into the mosques) is one way to keep a diverse population under some kind of quasi control. This control is reinforced by the wealth of a country whose inhabitants are largely subsidised, with gratuities paid those working for the extended royal family, and an army maintained by the promise of benefits. The rest of the world is demeaned in the name of religion, so that the final product of faith in this country often seems quite twisted. (Again – not unlike Christianity.)

The royal family is another curious complex. Evidently Abdul Assiz of the house of Saud was the chieftain whose power, during the Second World War, reached the point where the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was recognised on an international level, with Abdul Assiz named King. With the help of a number of wives, he fathered some 40 sons between 1910 and 1948 (I am unsure of the exact statistics there). Since his passing, the sons have inherited the throne – thus brother (or half-brother) has succeeded brother up until the present day. I have no idea what will happen when this generation of brothers dies. A choice will have to be made from the innumerable princes of the next generation. I suspect there will be and already is, much intra-familial bickering and enmity.

A memo from Zahrani: he has stated that it is forbidden for those who are not at work due to illness, to be seen at the souq or outside of the compound. I feel as if I have returned to primary school.

There was also a note posted at the entrance of the compound, stating it has been noted that individuals have been leaving their air-conditioning and other electrical appliances on while they are away at work or whatever, and requesting us to cut down electrical costs. It is not as if we had many illusions about the privacy of our rooms to being with.

Climbing the hill behind the compound the other day, between the rocks, boulders and tufts of spindly growth, I found a goat skull that now sits bleached and pale on the desk in my room. Someone mentioned seeing a cat skull up there as well. Maybe I shall start a collection.

December 8, 1986
I've received two more Christmas cards from Canada. How far away it seems right now. What a privilege it is to have walked those streets without being honked at, jeered at, cursed. It has got so that, unless someone else is heading into town, the wish to go is not present. There is little pleasure in going anywhere alone, but with company, the talking can blank out the jeering and honking of the Saudis.

As Dolores put it "Being here is like living in history – and I never did like history."

I often ask myself, what is the point of being in another country when you are effectively barred from seeing it? I wonder if I shall see any of it beyond this small circle of walking within Taif and the bit I've seen of Jeddah. There is a sense that restrictions are tightening. Even in Jeddah there is talk of creating a woman-only souq, which is another way of saying women won't be permitted elsewhere.

December 9, 1986
Pardon my inattention to detail! Dr. Lewis is now Ibrahim Easu (Jesus) Mohammed.

When Gassia came off shift yesterday, she was in a state that I have often recognised in myself. There is something in this place that pushes one to the limits of sanity and I cannot yet tell whether it is the premonitions of foreboding, or what. Whatever the case, this pay-day I'll buy the suitcase that will see me always partially packed to go, should such a situation arise.

In meditative moments I am still convinced of the rightness of my decision to be here. For all that there is a definite, and at times overwhelming, sense of wrongness about the place and my place here, it is also the pivot that will take me towards my next step. I feel like I'm living in a paradox and continuously struggling to maintain my balance. I still cannot see or say what my next step will be.

I've just returned from talking with Pauline and Dolores. Pauline is able to tell stories and leave the listener transfixed. She described Amsterdam in such living realities of pulse, temperament and colour that I almost feel as if I had been there already. I know more certainly than ever that it is a must for visiting – with emphasis on the Van Gogh Museum Gallery and the smells and feel of the city.

December 10, 1986
I am finally beginning to feel human again after my spell of illness, when what appears from Rehab Centre, but a pile of penicillin tablets with a little note asking me to return for a throat swab again in 2 weeks. It seems like someone figured out, a little late in that day, that I had caught something (b-haemolytic strep). It's scarcely worth taking the tablets now, since I've passed the stage of illness.

It's pay day. Pauline, Gassia and I did a bank trip, getting our money sorted out, treating ourselves to supper and finally returning back here in better spirits than we have experienced all week. I figure I have enough money aside now to purchase a year's worth of art supplies. Next step is to get aside a year's living expenses – then a bit of travel money, if I can hold out that long. If not, *c'est la vie*. Where there's a will there's a way. I shall yet paint again. I can feel it in my dreams. I will see the Van Gogh Gallery in Amsterdam, and I shall visit Britain. The how, what and when remain to be seen.

December 11, 1986
Dr. Lewis is still instructing Muslims on the value of prayer. He has written an order for one woman on the female ward to have her bed pushed into the hallway at 0530 so that she can pray there. It is one of the very few orders he has written down.

Friday, December 12, 1986
Now Dr. Lewis wants some of his male patients washed, showered and dressed by 0530 for early prayer (which also means undressing them and putting them back to bed afterwards). He was going to get the women to do the same until he realized that both sexes couldn't meet without the women being in full purdah – that, especially at prayer time, the sexes are kept separated. Even mosques have their separate sections. Now Dr. Lewis will have much company at morning prayer.

December 13, 1986
A while ago, Gassia was listening to one of the patient radios playing an Arabic station, while the '*don'ts*' of Islam were being preached; i.e. *don't listen to music, don't watch TV, don't have any pictures on the wall*, etc., for such is evil, as are most of the ways of the westerners. Yesterday, on Gassia's shift, one patient requested that she burn some stuff for him in the incinerator – the 'stuff' being all his music tapes, pictures, videos, and writings other than the Koran, etc. He said such things were *haram* – i.e. taboo and bad. He seems to feel, as Dr. Lewis is so sure, that devotees will be healed and this will put him on the right road. Also, a memo is out warning staff against wearing buddhas, crosses, or anything with religious connotations.

Evidently Dr. Lewis is being watched like a wolf in sheep's clothing. On finding that one of the patients who attended the mosque yesterday morning did not wish to go to prayer this morning, Dr. Lewis walked around at 0515 wakening patients until he had found someone else to go in place.

This 6-foot plus, middle-aged man is like someone caught in an overgrown case of puppy love when he stares and pants after one of the non-married Muslim Filipino girls in Rehab. It has been said that his wife died about a year ago and he has asked Gassia for Arabic phrases: e.g. *'How do you say, "I need a woman" in Arabic?'.* This, as Gassia puts it, is not a stock phrase in this country of purdah. I also heard that when one of the interpreters, a very attractive Sudanese woman, asked him how he was one day, his response was "I'm hungry". When she didn't understand, he elucidated. "I have no woman."

December 14, 1986
Dr. Lewis comes across more and more as a con artist personality. So far, I have heard of no action that indicates any ability as a doctor or any true medical or rehabilitation knowledge. He avoids, as much as possible, medical contact with patients, compensating with time spent preaching. I have read no doctor's order written by him that indicate any medical awareness of a situation. I believe he once wrote an order that the patient have water to drink on demand, but

that is about all. His religious 'devotion' is a perfect shield. It is also one that the Saudis have difficulty confronting.

In conversation with Ingrid at work today, he spoke of being twice divorced and finding it difficult to live without a woman. He says he has a fiancée in America who can't come out here because she is a businesswoman with a career in the United States, so he's requesting compassionate leave to go and marry her (apparently convinced that she will become Muslim at his whim). Then he will find a wife out here and have the whole thing completely above aboard. With his two wives (Inshallah) he won't be ogling every woman he meets. He also figures that women in this country are kept in their right place – hidden and obedient. This is, perhaps, one reason, why he haunts any Filipino woman who catches his eye. Some of them have approached me, asking what I think of him, and I am honest in my response: “Do not trust him”.

December 15, 1986
It is a strange feeling, to be the object of racial prejudice. For all the impressions one reads in books, the day to day living experience eats away at one's selfhood. The only place where there is an opportunity to shunt it aside is on the 2nd floor of Rehab housing – where we live. When going out of the unit, an immediate defence springs up. To walk alone is to imagine an invisible armour/ shell around one – to hold the face expressionless while pretending deafness and blindness to the honking of car horns and yelled obscenities. At shops, if Saudis are present, they push in ahead. To meet courtesy and friendliness in the souq is to meet a foreigner – whether they be Pakistani, Lebanese, Afghani, Yemeni, Sudanese, etc. White women appear to be strongly regarded as *Western Whores.* The Filipino women get the same treatment but more so. It is easier to go out in pairs or groups, for by talking with someone, it is easier to shut out the surrounding imprints. Walking alone will often find some Saudi in his thobe and red-white chequered ghutra, driving his car at a snail's pace alongside, yelling and laughing and making lewd comments in the most obvious way he can. Others just watch and laugh.

Even children, one learns, carry the imprint of their parents attitudes, throwing stones and hooting and laughing at us. I find myself closing inwards more and more. To make the decision to go out for groceries or whatever becomes a major decision. A decision that is best avoided until the last possible moment, or to wait until there is someone to go out with.

Gassia was talking to one of the physiotherapists from Al Hada, who was seen in the Emergency/ Casualty department, after being in downtown Taif yesterday. A couple of young Saudi men were working on a car and threw brake fluid at the two women, some of which got into one of the physio's eye. After the brake fluid, eggs were thrown at them.

Last night, when Gassia went into town with Pauline, some of the comments interpreted were the equivalent to "Let the bitches through, so that they can get the hell lost and we can be to ourselves again"; "The bitches are all the same"; and "I'll take the one in front, you poke the other". Even walking the streets without the direct interpretations that Gassia can offer, the tone of voice carries the implication of what is said. With Gassia's understanding of the language, her anger at the attitudes here gets very potent. Having been born in Syria, where her parents still live (and have since the Armenian genocide), she has an innate love of the Middle Eastern markets and flavours but is at the same time furious at the narrow-mindedness in this country.

The latest on Dr. Lewis is that there has been a big meeting at Rehab involving both Rehabilitation and Al Hada people. Evidently Dr. Lewis has propositioned some woman of influence, and they want him out.

I also heard that he has seen no more than one patient in the past 2 weeks of his official doctor capacity. That was the patient he did the xylocaine earlobe acupuncture on. It is a good suspicion that he wants his 'compassionate leave' to get out of the country because his deceptions are starting to catch up with him. The religious angle is a potent one though, because it strikes at the very guilts and the fundamental structure of the lives of these people. They scarcely dare to speak against him on the religious angle, since that would be degrading to themselves and their politicized interpretation of religion, so they are searching out another hook by which to get rid of him.

December 16, 1986
Dr. Lewis has definitely been spoken to. At 0500 hours today he only asked how many patients were going to the mosque and did no tour of the ward or wakening of patients to accompany him. Only two patients continue to get up and go.

A correction to the early impression I had about the red/ white chequered ghutras that the greater percentage of Saudis wear. I hear that the red and white are the colours of the House of Saud rather than depicting any other relationship. They are easily purchased at the souq, and it seems to be the Arab foreigners (e.g. Sudanese, Afghanis) and Bedouins from the desert who tend to wear the white. Also, while watching the odd bit of television at work (there is only one TV on our floor at the residence, and it doesn't work), white seems to be commonly worn by the king and princes. So what the actual meaning is, I am not sure, but the red and white does seem a favourite for general wear around here.

December 18, 1986
I bought a few more music tapes yesterday, from one of the very few stall-owners that allows women to sometimes enter his shop. He's as jumpy as an ant on hot coals, walking in and out, and watching the streets while we are inside (women aren't allowed in music shops).

Yesterday was a 'Team Conference' day: that time during which certain patients and their treatments and progress are discussed by doctors. It usually occurs on Wednesday afternoons. Yesterday, Dr. Lewis put in an appearance at the meeting scheduled for 1600 hours (specifically delayed so as not to interfere with the prayer time) – and after five minutes, he departed. He now spends large parts of most days up at Al Hada, saying he is researching their computer system.

Friday, December 19, 1986
I arrived at work last night, to be told by nurses on the ward, they had heard from patients, that Dr. Lewis had been terminated, and was trying to amass patient support for an unfair firing. There wasn't much support. This news was verified by Ingrid, who said that Dr. Lewis came to her, asking her opinion, and talking about starting up a petition for signatures in favour of keeping him. At 0530 he went to the mosque as usual, praying with the few patients that are still going to early prayer. He later dropped into Kate's office and spoke of not having slept all night. I did hear from Kate that he has a few days to build up a case for himself. He has now been in the country about 7-8 weeks.

There is a Filipino girl being sent home on Saturday (tomorrow) after spending six months in jail here. She got involved with a Saudi who was married, until the wife found out and accused her of the affair. A search of the building next to ours was carried out (Building 84) room by room until she was found. She admitted to the accusations and was jailed. It was not until recently she was told she could return home. A collection at work was taken up to get enough money to pay for her fare home. We are lucky, as Westerners, in that we have a stronger back-up and power from our home countries than do the Filipinos.

December 20, 1986
A few stories about Dr. Lewis keep surfacing – like the time he was found showing one of the female outpatients (a Muslim from birth) how to pray. He had a sheet spread on the floor, and was kneeling, bum up, giving directions to one who had grown up with the custom. Then there was the time in the mosque, where he was continuously asking one of the Muslims (Yunis) who was praying, how he should be sitting and how to position himself properly until Yunis broke up with laughter and had to leave because he couldn't continue with his prayers.

Dr. Lewis still feels he cannot be fired for any medical mishap – which is true because he's managed to avoid practising medicine since he's been here. He appeared on the ward between 0200 and 0300 hours to tell Kate the defence he has lined up for himself. His termination was supposed to be official at 0800 today – that is approximately half an hour ago.

December 21, 1986
My sister's birthday. Happy Birthday Elaine.

I heard that the departure of the jailed Filipino girl has been delayed for another week.

Another story I heard is that, on one occasion a couple of years ago, there were four Filipino women, walking in pairs – two in front, two in back – down the street, when some Saudis stopped a car, surrounded and hustled the back two into their car, and drove off. The girls were never seen or heard from again.

The good news of late is that I will be transferred to the paediatric ward. I will be glad enough to get away from the male shave-preps of the groins, the catheters, the condoms, and the continuous spats of self-righteous outbursts such as *"she didn't bring me my coffee"* or *"she wouldn't get me up when I asked her"* or "*she told me the king was a fool"* or *"she did this and didn't do that"*. A lot of problems here are self created between patient and Filipino staff. There is, with both, an essence of childish arguing in which both sides take their stand to get noticed. It does get wearing.

December 22, 1986
Rumours are flying about Dr. Lewis, but no one seems to know just what has happened; only that he has not been seen around here. It is said that he was trying to contact the embassy in Riyadh. It is also said that security has him in custody to escort him out of the country.

I need to change that last rumour. When I walking to Dolores, she mentioned that Dr. Lewis had come onto the wards in the middle of the night looking for Kate (who was off). So he's obviously not being held by Al Hada security to be doing that.

December 23, 1986
It is now 0715 hours, and I have been up since 0500 yesterday with only a forty-five-minute catnap in the late afternoon. It puts me in a frame of mine where I can observe but not feel drawn in. At work, I was listening to Dr. Lewis talking to one of the Filipino nurses on the ward (he barely acknowledges my presence nor I, his), when he dropped by around midnight:

Dr. L.: Did you read the copy of the Koran I lent you?
Nurse: Oh, I've been meaning to give it back to you. Here it is.
Dr. L.: Did you know the whole bible is contained in the Koran. (Silence.) Don't worry. I've got lots of copies, don't worry about it. (Pause.) Did you get to Jeddah on your days off?

Nurse: Yes.
Dr. L.: What, by bus?
Nurse" No, by car.
Dr. L.: That's *haram*.
Nurse: With a married couple.
Dr. L.: Then it's not *haram*. Did you buy anything there?
Nurse: I visited a friend.
Dr. L.: Oh. Is anyone getting up to prayer this morning?
Nurse: I don't think so.
Dr. L.: See what happens when I'm not around. They all fall back into sin.

Dr. Lewis hung around for about an hour, then he disappeared.

I walked home from work this morning in the usual way – face focused frontwards, eyes veering neither right nor left, but aware that the soldiers are standing out in front and beside their cars, changing from thobe into uniform. I walk robot-like, with the fence to my right and the barracks about fifty feet to the left with the soldiers in various states of dress, laughing, jeering, and joking their comments to the frosty morning. I passed security, crossed the busy 6 lane roadway, past the security of the housing compound, past building 84 to my building, and into the privacy of the hallway, stairs, and at last the hallway to my room.

I had a long talk with Kate at work last night. She's a very perceptive woman but lacking a certain emotional insight/ empathy. She recognises much but stops short of appreciating how her righteous judgements do more harm than good. Long epistles are written up by her about each nursing staff member she deals with. These epistles reflects her personal judgements and interpretation of each person, including all her personal prejudices and favoritisms. It seems that she uses these judgements as the basis of an evaluation on the worker – all written with the approach of being a psychological judge. She may write down that she considers someone to be rough, thoughtless and a bad nurse with an attitude problem, but the individual in question has no inkling of this judgement before being confronted with a final evaluation. Kate has been known, metaphorically speaking, to tear an individual to pieces in her evaluation, then read her comments out to them – and then wonder why the individual won't talk and laugh with her afterwards.

I talk freely to Kate about myself but refuse to pull any other person into the picture. I evade all questions that refer to others, realizing that whatever I say, she will record it as a judgement stated by me and affirmed by her. Any judgement she chooses to make is hers to find and I don't want any part of it. Knowing/ sensing this much about her, I have pretty fair idea of how to phrase myself in speaking with her. She does not recognise her own cruelty and feels hurt that people tend to hold her at arm's length.

Gassia was talking to one of the patients on the ward called Male II, the ward on which I work. This particular individual, Bishi, is a Sudanese who went into hospital (walking) with complaints of the sensation of pins and needles in his legs. He had a spinal fusion done which resulted in paraplegia. He is now trying to sue for compensation so that he can afford to live without becoming a beggar (begging is the only work option open for a paraplegic in Saudi). Gassia saw him coming out the office after talking with Dr. Zahrani and Dr. Saber (who is again the acting medical director of Rehab) plus a couple of doctors from Al Hada. There will be a hearing this weekend, and Bishi has been told not to mention that he came into the hospital walking – just that he had pain in his legs. In other words, he is being advised to act as if the doctors and the hospital responsible for his operation did everything they could and did no further damage than

had already been done. This would mean no case for suing. The upshot of the conversation was that both Gassia and Bishi agreed that Dr. Saber would '*sell his own grandmother'* if it was to his advantage and that the advice of the hospital bigwigs was most definitely not in Bishi's interests. I wish him luck at the hearing on Saturday.

The Dr. Lewis plot thickens. I went up to the shop around the corner between 1630 and 1700 hours and on the way out, passed a 6-foot 4-inch figure in ghutra, thobe and full brown woollen cape. It was Dr. Lewis in full gear. There was a large, white, four-wheel drive with the motor running and a Saudi driver waiting outside the shop. Talking later to Ingrid, it turns out there was a real name calling session between Lewis and Zahrani at Rehab this morning, and that there are now three military police in Lewis' flat and he is under house arrest.

I received a letter from Howard Vezina yesterday. It started me thinking of the past, and how certain aspects of a person's life seem fated. He writes of caring for his current male lover and the life that he has chosen. He wrote more of his personal life than he ever has before yet there seemed to be an underground, defiant tone – *here it is – like it or lump it*. At the same time it almost felt as if he would be afraid of my response. The letter didn't really come as a surprise. When I look over my past – and my three brief relationships – most of my male friends have been bisexual, or homosexual. I have had no success with lover relationships – but, on the other hand, I have found friendships that carry lifetimes.

There is special richness and depth that seems to grow within those who have had to question the norms in their lives; those who feel that the 'normal' is following someone else's pattern – one that they can't live or accept – thus they are pushed to search out their own directions. I feel a bit like one who walks the edge of many worlds, with access to them all, yet a member of none except the private world rooted in my painting and writing.

December 24, 1986
Strange, how I can't escape the feeling that working is a waste of precious time. The only time I didn't feel this way about work was when I was painting. Even when putting in seven days a week with the painting, I did not have this sense of days slipping away with no sense of worth to them.

It’s Christmas Eve. I work this evening and am, more-or-less, putting in time right now.

I’ve requested from Ingrid and Gassia (they are both nursing supervisors, subordinate to Kate) to schedule me for full hours next month (i.e. including the involuntary overtime). I’ve decided that the best way to get back at this peculiar system is, if I don’t want to work the extra days myself, I can sell them off, as Mavis does, by paying cash to one of the Filipinos to work in her stead for any shifts that add up to more than 48 hours per week. One day’s pay at a westerner’s pay rate would equal about 315 riyals, which would give a Filipino the equivalent to a quarter or more of their monthly wage.

More bits and pieces about the Dr. Lewis saga are emerging – fact and fiction already becoming inseparable. He has supposedly offered 300,000 riyals for the purchase(?) of marriage to a Saudi girl (most unmarried Saudi females being well under the age of twenty). Another story is that he has asked an Egyptian woman to marry him – a woman working in the dietary department up at the Al Hada complex. She is supposed to have accepted and taken her leave and is to meet him somewhere for the ceremony to take place. Whether or not the story is true, the woman has evidently taken early leave and is not around to admit or deny the story. All this seems very unlikely, since he has not even become a fully fledged Muslim yet. All the upheaval

and talk around him scarcely seems to have dented his ego. He appears to thrive on the atmosphere he has created around himself.

December 25, 1986
Evidently Dr. Lewis was yesterday transported to Jeddah and seen onto a plane back to America – still in full regalia. There was a parting comment to the effect that he loved this country and the religion – it's just the people he had trouble with – but he intended to return.

It's Christmas – not that it would be noticeable on the ward with the Muslim patients – for them this is just another day. The Filipinos and the Westerners collected together in the hallway for a short spell around 0030 hours, sharing food, conversation and best wishes. Janet survived the night shift despite feeling flu-ish – and Gassia came on shift this morning feeling poorly as well.

Oh yes – it is said that a letter has arrived from a prince, permitting Dr. Lewis to return within three weeks. It seems Dr. Lewis cultivated a few contacts during his time here. So it becomes another of those 'wait and see' set-ups.

One man, seen by Dr. Lewis in outpatients a few weeks ago, complained of pain in the legs and difficulty walking. The good doctor said he had trouble with the discs in the lumbar area and sent him home with crutches. Seen by Dr. Mitchell today, he was found to have blood sugars sky-high (diabetes) and blocked arteries in the legs, with lumbar discs still intact. He (the patient) is currently a patient in Al Hada.

Friday, December 26, 1986
I stayed up after work this morning, to walk to the shop that is a few streets away. It's about a ten-minute walk. I did the morning shopping I wanted to do, when the man who either runs the place or is a key worker in the shop (I suspect the former) suddenly pulled out a large tin of Ghee saying, '*for Christmas*'. The complete unexpectedness of it brought me closer to tears than anything else in this Muslim atmosphere of a Christmas. I think those that run this shop are Pakistani but am not sure. I shall offer the Ghee to Gassia, since she adds so much to the togetherness of our floor with the meals she plans and prepares and then demands company to join her with the eating.

December 27, 1986
I had a morning walk into town with Ingrid. We stopped in at the Assiz Hotel – the one place that women may enter and sit for a cup of coffee or whatever – especially during the prayer time when everything is closed. It is the closest thing to a coffee shop I have found in Taif – also, the only place to be assured of a female washroom.

After entering the dark hallway of the entrance and passing the hotel office/ desk/ counter area, we make a left through an unremarkable door to enter the large lounge area. The main part of the room is set up in sofas, armchairs and coffee tables to form some four or five rectangular sitting areas, each of which could easily seat about ten people around a central coffee table. In the far corner of the room is a bit of a water fountain with rainbow lights and fake plants. Beside it is a double doorway without doors, leading into a smaller room with two large sofas, bounded by deep armchairs on either side. Coffee tables are placed to formed two opposite groupings. It is here that the women usually sit. It is a place that feels safe, and where we can sit, talk and drink coffee while the prayer call is on. It is always open (so far as I know) and to sit in the subdued lighting and chat is to feel a sense of total escape from the tensions of the outside world.

We stopped in twice this morning. I felt devilishly decadent doing so, since the coffee costs the equivalent to $1.50 per person.

December 28, 1986
Private dreams of painting awaken me within hours of hitting the bed, after a twenty-four-hour stretch of being awake. It is like light at the end of a long, dark prison sentence. Laughter here is always edged with cynicism.

Next month's rotation has been figured out to place most of the westerners on night shift. This is a choice for most of us, because of the ridiculous and frustrating situations encountered on day shifts. Doctors, who average twenty patients apiece to their individual in-centre caseload, dote on these extended care individuals, plying them with x-rays, tests and varying medications to assure them that they are being cared for. Any task or detail that is too much for the various, upper levels of this hierarchical system gets shunted on downwards to the ward nurse on duty.

The preoccupation of the nursing supervisor and Director of Nursing is the manipulation of patients and staff – like a game of pawns. Workers are essentially without support for their actions, thus have minimal rights and are regarded as servant/ slave equivalents by both patients and the Nursing Director. This is a country where it is very easy for a westerner in charge to be a big frog in a little pond – and the croaking around here gets very irritating and repetitive. I would far rather be near a real pond listening to wisdom of giant bullfrogs. I have no wish to be insulting to frogs in my comparisons here.

When on the night shift, Kate asks me about all the things that irk me and how things could, perhaps, be smoothed over. Then she offers up some of my own ideas as her own when the supervisors meeting comes about. There appears to be only one person's horn she is prepared to blow and that is her own. She is also a great one for planting ideas in the hope that some may get airing. And I guess that's enough of mixed metaphors for one stretch.

Are we safe in the Assiz Hotel? Those who run the place know who-is-who. The place is said to be a front for a prostitution ring – a ring that is said to include some Westerners, some Filipinos and even some Saudi women. When Ingrid and I were sitting there the other morning, one Saudi, a tall, young lad in ghutra and thobe came in two or three times. (To approach women is considered taboo in this country.) The first time he said, *'Oh, I'm sorry'* and left. Then he entered again, asking *'Do you know Glen Williams?'* Then he asked us to sit with him in the other area to which I answered an abrupt *'NO'*, while Ingrid looked astounded. He later entered one last time to apologise.

December 29, 1986
More curiosities; Rehab evidently does have a budget for overtime. The curious question is, *where is the money is getting spent?* since it does not get utilized to pay for nursing overtime. Here, I shall put down a story that wraps around our nursing director, Paddy-Jane (noting that I have no verification for this, so it is hear-say).

She came to Taif about five or six years ago as a staff nurse fresh out of British Nursing School and worked on the wards in the, then new, Rehabilitation Centre. When the contract for running the place was handed over to a different recruiting company, they gradually cut the pay to staff members more and more, to cover a decreasing budget (various companies bid for the contract to run the place for a given number of years – the lowest bid usually wins). Paddy achieved her promotions by assuming positions vacated by those who did not consider the new contracts were worth their while. Things hit an all time low when SCM (Saudi Charter Medical – who is our

current recruiting company) took over the hiring and funding of Al Hada and Rehab. At that time, most westerners left en-masse. Paddy and Kate were the only two westerners remaining at Rehab. The rest of the nursing staff that was Filipino.

Paddy was offered and accepted the position of Nursing Director. Then, about a year ago, she became very involved with a Saudi she had met while working at the centre. With the promise of a marriage alive in her mind, she became a Muslim. It seems she was unaware that the open display of males and females meeting and caring for one another would be translated as 'loose', so far as his family were concerned (not to mention the likelihood of prejudice against inter-racial marriage). She believed that her Saudi boyfriend did not want to marry the woman to whom he was promised, until, sometime near the beginning of '86, when he disappeared and has not been seen since. It is to be assumed that family pressures resulted in the arranged marriage. By this time, Paddy was well-established in her own little kingdom at Rehab and was a Muslim.

During their affair, there was a time when the boyfriend (as an employee at Rehab) was absent for a week. A friend of his noticed that his time sheet not only registered that the boyfriend had been at work but that he had worked a great deal of overtime during that absent week. The friend confronted Paddy, and Paddy requested his silence on the matter – in exchange for adding a tidy amount of unworked overtime to the friend's time sheet as well. It seems that the overtime for which this place is budgeted does find its outlet. The only question marks are on who gets paid for it.

It must make Paddy uncomfortable – all these new westerners (all 6 of us) confronting her with things that the Filipinos wouldn't dare say for fear of being terminated. Paddy has a position, complete with strings by which she can manipulate Zahrani, Saber and Tajaldeen. She must play the role cleverly, so as not to make it noticeable or intrusive. By the same token, she is, no doubt, in a position to be manipulated by them. Being Muslim, her position is more secure than ever – but at the same time, it is more open to rebuke if she does not follow the required prayer times and fasting (and likely more aspects I have no knowledge of). She must feel a bit like the Queen, in Alice in Wonderland. One Filipino finally managed a transfer to Al Hada (wanting more of a proper nursing experience) after months and months of application, persuasion and pulling a few strings via friends. That is a rare happening.

Another nurse was to go home to the Philippines on compassionate leave regarding the death of her father – and Paddy managed to get the leave cancelled due to the staffing problem at Rehab. This place is sometimes reminiscent of the 'Eagles' song, 'Hotel California' – *you can check out any time you like but you can't never leave*. There are dozens of such stories floating around.

So much for my transfer to the Paediatric ward that was to happen in two days time. Paddy just rearranged all the duties, so that I remain on night shift on Male Two. I found out about it at 1930 hours today, after Gassia got off shift.

December 30, 1986
Position is all important to Paddy. With her dyed, ash-blond hair wrapped in a white veil and her long, white, thobe-like skirt and white blouse, she sways her bulk down the hallways as if she was a lady of the manor. She looks outraged when anyone dares to question her moves. She is the liaison between the nursing side and the administrator, Zahrani. Comments such as "*I tried to tell him, dear"* (‘dear’ is a favourite word of hers) *"but he's in a bad mood today"...*or..."*No, dear. No, dear. I know how to approach him. Just leave it to me".*

Once again, I have the flu, complete with temperature, passing out, gut-ache. Since this place doesn't like to admit that nurses can be ill, I hope the worst of it eases before my night shift starts tomorrow evening.

December 31, 1986
The last day of 1986 creeps past. My flu symptoms have receded somewhat. Work shall cover the transition into the new year and mean that there are only sixteen months left to the contract. Eight months left until holidays. Considering the amount that has happened in the past three and a bit months, the future is anything but predictable. I feel that, for one reason or another, my contract will end before its time, but that may be wishful thinking.

January 1, 1987
I was talking to Kate, while at work last night. She said that, according to Mama Doris (a tall, square, toothless, aging heavyweight of an Egyptian – a cross between a bordello madam and a sergeant-major), who is in charge of housing both here and at Al Hada, Dr. Lewis has already received his re-entry visa to come back to Taif and work as a doctor at the Psychiatric Hospital in town. He could turn up here any time within the next few weeks.

The new year arrived without much notice, since I was in the middle of one procedure or another at the time. The staff from a couple of wards gathered and shared a traditional Filipino spread, which meant that a good time was had by all. This occurred in between answering call bells and the usual servant routines.

I do enjoy my night conversations with Kate while on shift. She is a very perceptive woman. If she would just ease up on her intensity and desire to be liked, and be herself, I suspect she would find herself far more liked, and likeable.

I just heard some terrific news via Janet and Ingrid. This place has actually decided to pay overtime to the nurses' aides. Rehab is finally admitting that it is dramatically short-staffed, so that means a nursing aide, who averages six riyals per hour at basic rate, will earn an extra twenty-four riyals for a twelve-hour overtime shift, which is about six dollars. Alhumdillilah.

January 2, 1987
When I try looking ahead at the year to come, all I can really come up with is, that I need a breakaway – a holiday. Maybe I will use ten days of my annual leave for an out-of-country escape – perhaps to Greece in the first bit of May. I have already made out a holiday form, it only needs handing in. The alternative is quitting.

January 3, 1987
Out of a population of eight million plus people in Saudi, about three million are foreigners. Those three million are the bulk of the working force of the country. Of employed Saudis, about ninety per cent of them are in the army. Most Saudis tend to look upon foreigners as their servants or slaves, refusing to admit (or not wanting to admit) that foreigners are the means by which this country maintains its surface of modernity.

Just before coming off work this morning, Paddy Jane came over to the ward and apologized for not letting me know that I was remaining on Male II, but '*I didn't want to leave you a note, dear*'. I suppose she must mean that explaining everything to me three days after I was supposed to begin work on Paeds, is better than leaving me a note. She also said that my staying on this ward for another month is because we are '*so short-staffed*'. I think Paddy made this rather back-handed apology because Kate might have said something, after I told Kate that Paddy was

making a hell of a lot of enemies by treating people like pawns in a chess game, with no respect or courtesy to the lives she is manipulating.

January 4, 1987
I had a quick swim in the pool today. By quick, I mean I did my sixteen laps in half time. With night temperatures dropping to about freezing level, the pool temperature must be somewhere around 38 degrees Fahrenheit. Even our tap water in the housing units doesn't run that cold, but it did get me outside at midday for the first time in about a week.

I like the pool. I have rarely seen anyone else use it. It remains locked at all times, but I climb over the fence and dive in and have done so for the past few months (except when too cold). There is supposed to a schedule of available times, but since no one else seems to use it, I go around mid-morning to midday for a couple of hours swim and sun. It feels like a private pool – a sensation which I very much enjoy.

Gassia returned from four days visiting in Jeddah, having reached a conclusion similar to mine. She doesn't figure she'll last the rest of her contract in this set-up.

Kevin has returned from leave in Oman and has secured a position in Oman. All that remains to be seen are the final details, and he shall be out of here. Dr. Grant handed in his three-month notice yesterday, having reached a limit in this place. Gassia plans to write to her sister in Canada. Janet is awaiting news from Australia about positions there. Gassia is awaiting the same.

January 5, 1987
Months overdue, but the Saudi Government came out with its annual budget a few days ago, and there is thirty-five per cent tax being put on the sale of all imported goods – which covers most of the saleable merchandise in this country – food, shoes, clothing, electrical equipment, perfumes, make-up, carpets etc. There is very little, outside of Bedouin stuff, that this tax will not cover.

January 6, 1987
Well – that was fast. The talk of a thirty-five per cent sales tax must have been a test comment, which, within twenty-four hours, managed enough reaction to be cancelled. So things stand pretty much now as they did previously.

Ingrid leaves for Jeddah, then home for vacation, after finally getting her ticket, which she was supposed to have picked up on January 2nd. It still hadn't come through from Jeddah today, so had to be hand-written. The Al Hada hierarchy holds passports until the very last minute before leave, so with luck on her side, Ingrid should have her passport by tomorrow at 1600 hours, having persuaded the man up there that she must be going to Jeddah tomorrow evening and Thursday will be too late. This place is very high-handed about returning what is one's own property, and they certainly don't seem to give too much of a damn about their employees.

At last – for the month of January, the schedules have finally come out. So now I know what days I will be working after January 9th.

January 7, 1987
Today, Ingrid leaves for holidays until February 9th. One westerner less on the floor makes quite a dent – down by about fifteen per cent.

January 8, 1987
I was talking with Gassia in our long hallway, which holds the faceless red doors of some seventeen rooms plus laundry room, lounge, and elevators – when two men arrived via the elevators. One wore greyish coveralls; the other was in Saudi attire. Gassia was at the doorway to her room, still in her night-gown, and I was still up from night shift, waiting to go into Taif and spend my last nine riyals on groceries to cover the next few days. Our mutual response to the men was '*what in the hell are you doing here*'. They began to come down the hallway saying, '*don't be afraid ladies, we're checking fire safety*' or some such thing. I said, *'I don't care, there's no men allowed here. This is a female building.'* Gassia said, loudly and angrily, *'Men aren't permitted here.*' She backed into her room, slamming the door, and I went into mine, doing the same. The rules are made for foreigners and are supposed to reflect the rules of the country, but it seems the Saudis can and do breach them whenever they want, so far as foreigners go.

January 9, 1987
I'm beginning to put together a box that I shall send back to Canada. It will include a few small gift items that have been purchased to date. There are a few more odds and ends that I'd like to pick up, so, with a bit of luck, shall have the package enroute by next month.

For a single woman to meet the eyes of a man in this country while talking to him, is the equivalent of propositioning him, so it becomes a habit to walk down the streets or through the souq, with eyes down while passing men by as if they are invisible – like figments of one's imagination. It is an approach that they are used to. Gradually, I am learning, while speaking to them in the shops or at work, to avert my eyes quickly – although after a lifetime of learning otherwise, it is a difficult habit to pick up.

January 10, 1987
I know that it is becoming more and more of habit in our world of record keeping, to maintain a written, running commentaries on the function of various employees – but when such a system results in one or two individuals passing judgement on others, with no input or defence, then the system is a warped one. It can easily become vicious and unfair. So it is in Rehab, where the function and personality and attitude of each nurse is kept on record – essentially written, judged and kept by Kate Camerelli.

In her office, in a locked drawer, she keeps the notes (diary-like) of her perspective of people and events. She does this from the safe position of no one writing out a biased judgement on her performance or attitudes in the same way. There is no file describing the fact that Kate and Paddy offer little or no support to their staff, and there is nothing in those damning notes to reflect the bad and often worse working conditions. Reading mine last night, for example, (due to the fact that Gassia feels that all such notes should be open to the individual who is being criticized) I read the fact that I refused to work any more than the basic, contracted shifts of forty-eight hours per week but there was no mention of how staff are slated for unasked for overtime.

Even now, only nurses aides who work more than forty-eight hours a week will get paid overtime for the extra hours – but others still work those extra hours for regular pay. I noticed that the schedules have been worked out this month, so that, over the course of the roster, I actually only work seventeen shifts, hence losing the equivalent of a day in pay and hours. There is no mention of this in the report either. The tone of writing reflects Kate as a concerned guardian angel willing to help me improve my attitude.

Kate's comments on the staff vary from 'conscientious' to 'poor' or 'thoughtless' or 'disorganised' – most such information being elicited from individuals through her round-about manner of

questioning rather than being an impersonal statement on performance. She is not on the wards to witness anything first-hand. Kate has described (without seeming to realize the fullness of what such statements say) how individuals have reacted angrily, or burst into tears, or been indifferent towards her when she shows them her critical reports. What she thinks is not an objective resumé but is a personal evaluation on her likes and dislikes about the person, which reflects Kate's own prejudices and preferences. The whole file should be set on fire.

January 11, 1987
Five Saudi riyals are the equivalent to twenty Philippine dollars – thus, despite the trials and tribulations this country puts the Philippine people through, they are able to earn more money than they could ever do at home, hence making them quite well-off in their own country.

For all the talk of overtime now being permissible, we still worked short-staffed by one-member last night – with only three instead of four staff on the ward, so that we were hopping between rooms without any break for the first six hours of shift.

January 12, 1987
I was in town today, with Gassia and Dolores. While drinking coffee at the Assiz Hotel, I decided that it made the perfect birthday treat – and Gassia suddenly decided that we must all go out for lunch to celebrate, saying "*You can just tell everybody that on your birthday, you were in Saudi, and forced by this strange lady of Armenian/ Syrian background to go out for a meal. So there.*"

So we went and a lovely time was had, between rice and soup and dishes of Korean/ Arabic/ Chinese mixtures. I swore to Gassia that I'd get back to her for this. I have plans with others on this floor, to go together and purchase a good set of binoculars for her, so that she can watch the birds, dogs, cats etc. in their climb up the rocks on the hilly side of the residence, which her room faces. Her love for the living creatures of this world is of legendary proportions. With a start like this to my birthday year, I suspect it will prove to be no less eventful and curious as the days unfold.

January 13, 1987
Turn about-face and exit stage left. I entered shift last night to find that Paddy had agreed with one of the patients that he could be regularly bathed at 0530. This individual is one of the most time-consuming and difficult patients on the ward, and 0500 hours to 0700 hours is the busiest time of morning at the end of a 12-hour shift. I said, '*No way, we're too busy at that time of morning'*, when I came on shift. The other patients' needs, turns, etc., during that morning spell took well over an hour of steady work on a good day – which means it could take much longer on a busy day. I said that I would speak of the matter with Paddy in the morning.

At 0700, I was due to report to Paddy for my three-month evaluation, so I reported. Before the evaluation began, I told her that we did not bathe this particular individual last night and why. The conversation quickly became a confrontation, during which I told her exactly what I thought of the place, that I though the Filipinos were being used like slave labour, and why I refused to add this to our list of morning duties. About 10 minutes later, her face flushed and bright with pent-up anger, when I said again that there was no way we could fit him in at 0530 – he would have to be done at 0430 since it took two staff members over an hour to deal with him. She finally said, *'I think that's enough for now'.* She put my evaluation sheet aside, unread and unsigned. I left, feeling as if I had, at least, got my point across.

Gassia's evaluation was yesterday, which was also a 'conversation' during which Gassia expressed her views.

Kevin has written up a long memo citing his opinions of this place from his perspective, and at the same time requesting a transfer to Al Hada for reasons cited.

The war continues. Battle stations manned.

I also discovered that Paddy is officially the ASSISTANT Director of Nursing – although she signs everything as and goes by the title of Director of Nursing.

I had a quick trip to the souq with Janet and we've purchased the binoculars for Gassia. Split five ways, it becomes quite reasonable. It cost us fifty-four riyals each, for a zoom lens, 10-25 x 50 magnification set of good quality binoculars. Janet, Dolores, Pauline, Ingrid and I have all, at times felt overwhelmed by Gassia's innate generosity and she is a stubborn nitwit about refusing any return in kind. It shall be given February 9th or 10th, after Ingrid returns from her vacation and before Dolores and Pauline leave for theirs. So now I must get some sleep. I've been up since 1700 yesterday, and it's past 1300 hours now. I think 30 hours is about my limit this time round.

A couple of hours shut eye has revived me till later this evening. Earlier, I think I mentioned that the Filipinos are great ones for having get-togethers to celebrate birthdays, holidays etc., with food and dancing. To date I have avoided going to any of these by saying that I am not a party person, which is quite true. At these frequent dues, videos and pictures are constantly taken. Last night, the 'New Year's video' of their party was actually brought in to work and run on one of the patient's TVs. He watched it, making a running commentary of the whole thing. Gassia told us about it, as well as some of the comments made. Things said were along the lines of '*look at that one - a real tart'.* Since it shows men and women dancing, laughing and cavorting around, it is incredibly unwise to show it to the Saudi patients.

For the patients to even watch such a thing startled me – It is not ethical according to their Muslim code. I will definitely continue to avoid such parties if this is where they end up being seen.

Another rumour: That General Linjowee is out of a job (he was/is the overall military head of SCM for Al Hada and Rehab – in charge of the company contracting foreigners for this particular set-up) and is being replaced by a man no less powerful, by the name of Macrabe. I know nothing about either of them, except by hearsay, but evidently, Macrabe is far more religiously oriented.

Alhumdillilah. I just received a letter from Anne Rayvals, citing her holiday plans for visiting England will find her arriving there on September 12th. So I shall keep my holidays as I have tentatively booked them – beginning September 9th – and hopefully, we shall connect! It begins to feel real once dates start being confirmed.

January 14, 1987
Dr. Grant has rescinded his resignation and will stay until his contract ends in September. The company has made it *worth his while* – i.e. an increase in pay that makes staying lucrative enough to balance the difficulties of working in this country. I believe that is exactly what he was aiming at, since enough hints were dropped that he might change his mind if they made it worth his while.

January 15, 1987
It does sound as if Paddy has become caught in this Muslim role without really wanting it. Via Gassia, the patients' impressions of her religion is '*what Muslim?*' They figure she only did it to marry that Saudi man and he would never have married her anyway – but now she can't '*back out of it*'. During Ramadan; a time when no food, no fluid, no anything (including blood tests etc.) can be taken in between sunrise and sunset – there is strict fasting, when even non-Muslims are forbidden to be seen eating, chewing gum, etc. During such times, Paddy has been known to imbibe in food and be reprimanded by Zahrani for it. It is a situation which she created and in which she has become trapped.

January 16, 1987
Coming off work this morning, Kate mentioned to me that the '*fellow I had come into the country with, one of the four of us, had been asking about me yesterday*'. Evidently the group I arrived with hadn't heard from me and were wondering how I was getting on. Kate gave them the phone number of the supervisor's office if they wanted to phone while I was on nights. She also told them what shifts I was working so they could figure out when I'd be at Rehab – since that is the only telephone access available to us here.

Janet did an overtime shift in Medical ICU at Al Hada yesterday. She said there were three nurses for four patients and there was almost nothing to do. I compare that with not getting more than a ten-minute smoke break between 1900 hours and 0100 hours on shift last night. Perhaps I should consider some overtime at Al Hada.

January 17, 1987
This job is definitely testing out my personal limits. Every night I put in becomes one more that doesn't have to be done again. By counting down in this way the weeks gradually edge ahead. I feel like I'm wishing my life away. Is it worth it? Kate has said the days seem to last forever but the weeks disappear. I don't know if I can hang on until the September holidays. It feels like a piece of forever staring me in the face, but after tonight I'm off for a night. Hopefully it will give me a chance to pull myself back into some kind of balance. What is that Kris Kristofferson song? *...'Help me make it through the night...'*

January 18, 1987
A new supervisor is being oriented on days at Rehab. Her name is Hazell. She has had some experience with orthopaedic rehabilitation. She is married and lives with her husband at Al Hada. That is about all I know of her. Kevin has not met her. Due to his 'unfavourable' position among the politicos of Rehab, it is Janet who is being asked to orient her and show her around.

January 19, 1987
In order, from least to best, the so-called sexual preference of the men – as it is rumoured by various biased sources – the worst, or lowest on the scale, is a woman. Better with a man. Better yet, with a boy. Best with an animal. (I suspect this might a biased western perspective.)

On the other hand, Gassia recalls an incident, while working in Yambou Out-Patients Department, where two goats were brought into the hospital to be swabbed and tested in relation to the genital ailment of one of the male patients.

January 20, 1987
It’s been another day in which the power and water has been off and on. It seems to be happening more frequently lately, which leads to candlelight visiting between rooms. At least this time, the duration of the blackout was short. A few weeks ago it was almost day-long. Last year

it lasted a few weeks and the people in housing here had to go over to Rehab to shower. It also developed in many, a habit of keeping five-gallon water jugs in their rooms for drinking and other basics, like helping to flush the toilets.

Pauline was talking to Hassan Tajaldeen, mentioning that it was not proper that, when Christian staff are expected to work Christmas Day, Muslim staff get the day off. His reaction was, '*Well, it is only once a year.'* She also commented that she knew at least five western staff who would not be recontracting. His return, *'Well, that's their problem, isn't it?'* Essentially it is the administration here that is not anxious to have the western staff around, since westerners tend to stand up for themselves and create problems. The general docility of the Filipinos is preferable.

January 21, 1987
I have rebooked my holiday time to begin August 29th and to go until mid October. There is nowhere that I want to go in May, plus the fact that I will not rest easily until I have enough money aside to do at least a year's worth of painting. By February, I will be only halfway to that goal. I think I will find it easier hanging in here for a year, to make the dream a certainty, than to start spending before I have that assurance.

January 22, 1987
My mind feels easier now that I have purchased the luggage I need to replace that which was damaged during the trip here. It makes me feel that, if the need to leave ever arose suddenly, I am prepared.

January 23, 1987
I arrived at work last night to find a small packet that had arrived two days earlier was waiting for me – a birthday gift from Anne Rayvals that included two cassette tapes and a Capricorn horoscope book. I've scanned the book, and I'm playing the tapes thinking of how friends are the true ties that keep the world in some kind of focus. (As per usual, the packet had already been opened.)

Also, I have discovered that I will be working on Paeds next month but have reached the point where I hardly care anymore. (Paeds is supposed to the easiest of the various wards which include Male I, Male II, Female, Paeds and ILF/ Independent Living Facilities.)

Another story I was told: An Indonesian woman was hired by a Saudi couple to work for them in this country. One day the husband raped the woman while the wife stood at the closed door of the room they were in, not allowing her to get out. When the poor woman finally did get the door opened, the Saudi wife was ready with a pot of boiling water that she threw into her face, contending that the woman must have enticed the husband. The Indonesian woman ended up at a community clinic and was attended by an Egyptian woman doctor who reported the couple and had them jailed. They next day, some Saudi officials came to tell the doctor she would have to rescind her charges and let the couple go free by order of some prince or another. The doctor refused, saying that this type of thing was happening too frequently.

At an anniversary party given by one of the Filipino couples, Paddy was in attendance. All were watching one of the past videos of some party or another – something that is often done at their gatherings, remembering past times and past events. Paddy made a comment about one of the Filipino cleaners, to the effect that *'she is too good for fifty riyals a time'*. The girl was later approached by a man who said he had heard she would be laid for fifty riyals according to Paddy. The girl was upset and in tears at the untruth. Paddy was approached by the woman in

charge of housekeeping/cleaning. Paddy's reaction, *'Oh, it was just a joke dear. I didn't mean anything by it'*.

January 24, 1987
Yesterday morning, in Taif, four executions were carried out. Beheadings.

January 25, 1987
I decided last night that if my writing and drawing are not being pursued in off time, then I might as well work the extra hours so that I can save more money for the future. I've decided I will work full hours at Rehab even though they don't pay the overtime for extra shifts, and I'm also considering applying for occasional overtime shifts at Al Hada. The latter however remains to be seen at this time.

The rotations came out yesterday for next month. So far, it still looks like I will be working on Paeds as of the beginning of February. Inshallah, there will be no last-minute changes.

I just got back from a quick midday trip to the Rehab centre where I spoke with Paddy. Our personalities do abrade. The upshot of the 'conversation' was that, in view of my comments about slave labour in reference to the Filipinos, which she took extreme exception to, she wouldn't offer any changes in her approach. I refused to rescind my words, and she said she wouldn't change my basic forty-eight or less hours per week. She spoke as if offering me a punishment, but I cannot say I am upset. I have done things according to protocol so cannot be accused of doing anything behind her back.

Effectively, I can now put my energies into overtime at Al Hada, which is totally to my own advantage. According to Paddy, every one of the Filipino nursing staff chooses to work overtime without overtime pay – which is not the story I hear from the nursing staff. It is more a situation that they can't work at Al Hada and are boxed into working the extra hours at Rehab if they want to earn any extra money.

Paddy had a tight-faced, narrow-eyed look, as if she was using every bit of energy to maintain civility. My comments had hit her as if she herself was the one I had insulted. Her identity is so closely bound up in the Rehab administration that maybe she was. Perhaps it was she who first thought up this way of getting the Filipinos to work the extra hours (but I don't think she's that twisted – I think she somehow got boxed into her current position and can't see out of the box).

January 26, 1987
Today, Mavis went up to Al Hada, and Gassia with her, to let General Linjowee know of Mavis' resignation, and, if it fit, to comment subtly on some of the underlying reasons. When Gassia returned she said she is considering applying for a transfer to Al Hada. Also, after talking to one of the supervisors there, she appears to think I'll have no problem in getting a few extra shifts at Al Hada. A comment Kate made yesterday effectively told me not to count on getting the holiday time I requested for September, since there would be a lot of contracts finishing around that time. My reaction was that one way or another the time between the 12 September and 4 October was unalterable, since I had arranged to meet a friend in England between those dates. I also mentioned that I had placed request very early – and would have that time off, even if it meant breaking my contract.

January 27, 1987
Gassia put in a request to transfer to Al Hada this morning. Paddy was all smiles and suggested that she, herself, get in touch with those at Al Hada. There are two possibilities here. One, that

Paddy will try and blacken Gassia so as to eliminate the possibility of a transfer. The other is that she will encourage and support the transfer. I think the latter possibility is more likely and more to Paddy's advantage. Gassia's Syrian/ Armenian background and fluency in Arabic actually threatens Paddy's rule. While waiting for Paddy to arrive this morning, Gassia was talking to the man on the switchboard who warned her that Paddy Jane Gadsden was like a *'snake with fangs'* – pardon me – this is a misquote – I believe the words Gassia translated were *'she bites like a snake'*.

January 28, 1987
It is after 1300 hours and I am shattered. I've only had about three and a half hours sleep since waking up at 0900 on 26th January. I must get a bit more rest before work tonight.

Last night at shift change, Kevin confirmed what we had often suspected – that most of Paddy's dealings with the staff are totally outside of Zahrani's dealings or awareness and that there are many things that do not get passed on to him. Hers is an ivory tower office. On the other hand, with the mistruths that abound here, I would be hard pressed to guess at what Zaharani does or does not know.

This morning Dolores, Gassia, Janet and I met Mavis in town and did a walk-about of the souq ending up at Mavis and Andre's flat (Andre being at work) for coffee. Their flat is absolutely fabulous and surrounded with bits of Bedouin jewellery (some hundred plus necklaces that have been beautifully remade from the original Bedouin bits to form a much more wearable piece, instead of the extreme throw-together irregularity of the originals). There were old brass coffee pots, carpets, antique muskets on the wall and much, much more. It was a fascinating visit.

And now – with only three hours sleep, I must try to push it for another twelve plus hour shift – Inshallah.

January 29, 1987
I had a phone call last night and I am scheduled for my first night of overtime at Al Hada tomorrow evening – 1930 to 0800, working on Medical Intensive Care Unit. At the moment, I am still functioning far better than I could have dared believe, had someone told me that six hours of sleep over a seventy-two-hour spell could keep a person going. Perhaps the altitude helps. Who knows?

The latest rumour has it that Dr. Lewis is in Riyadh.

January 30, 1987
I actually managed five hours of sleep before wakening at 0330, when I went out onto the small porch, just off the lounge on this floor, to see the stars. I noticed Gassia's lights were on in her room, so dropped by for a visit and am only now back in my room at 0830 hours. Gassia is having a harder and harder time coping with Rehab. Now, I must get a couple more hours of sleep before my first night of work at Al Hada this evening.

January 31, 1987
It's the end of January and of my first night of overtime. I can't exactly say I was a raving wonder on the Paediatric ward last night but considering I've had no acute care nursing for about ten years, I figure the night went tolerably. The extra pay will help to pay for the box I intend to send to Vancouver so can't complain on that score. After this month doing of overtime shifts, I don't know if I'll be that anxious to continue. The five possible days I've put down for February might just about meet my tolerance level.

February 1, 1987
This place is beginning to break Gassia. She has been informed by Al Hada's Assistant Director of Nursing, that if permission was given for transfer, she would be welcome at Al Hada. On the other hand, she has been informed by Zahrani that he didn't want to approve the transfer. Gassia says her only alternative is resignation. Her ability to cope with Rehab and the politics of this place has withered from little to none when it comes to the petty irritants. For her own sanity – she needs to get out of Rehab.

February 2, 1987
I saw Gassia for just a few seconds before she headed out to mail some letters. I suspect she is notifying friends of her decision to leave.

February 3, 1987
I've finally fully recognised my own bisexuality. As usual in my life, it seems I am cornered in such a way that it must be kept to myself. I have fallen for someone here, but she is in love with another. So be it.

Meanwhile, the latest supervisor at Rehab (Hazell) is not making herself popular. She floats around (still being oriented) and acts like Allah's gift to the Centre. She tells everyone else what is wrong with the place. She is even giving Kate instructions on how her job should be run. It's not a promising start for this large, fairly young (thirty-ish) broad-faced, somewhat matronly looking woman. She has more pride in the fact that her husband of a few weeks makes lunch for her every day, and cooks supper for her, than she is of her own independence. To date, her over-bearing, know-it-all approach has put most backs up and attracted no allies – except, maybe Paddy – but even that is a maybe.

February 4, 1987
Paediatrics in Rehab is an absolute treat to work on. It's more like a daycare, or boarding home than nursing. By the time my three months on this ward is over it should feel like a holiday between nursing wards, neatly splitting up my first year.

There are thirteen patients (one empty bed) ranging in age from two to twelve, mainly afflicted with mental retardation and/or cerebral palsy plus two head injuries and a couple of paraplegics (one due to spina bifida, one due to an accident).

February 5, 1987
Curiously, a/c d/c seems to be more the rule than the exception with many individuals (including westerners) working in Saudi. Paddy is rumoured to have her following of Filipino women. Kate has a female 'cousin' in Ireland, to whom she sends all her money who is involved in building a house for their futures. At Al Hada, there are a number of individuals so inclined. Such individuals also tend to be among those who remain for longer periods of time. This is not surprising when one appreciates the way heterosexual restrictions are continually reinforced.

February 6, 1987
I had another long talk with Kate this afternoon, which was very mellow and enjoyable. There is a side to the woman I like very much. As with all of us, the difficulties and challenges of early life have created who we are – good points and bad points – and are part of what landed us here in Saudi. The closeness of this place breeds an intensity of strong character interactions, which easily erupts into issues, some of which find resolution and hopefully, learning. I sometimes

wonder who will still know or reconnect with whom in another five or six years. We are such a strange mixture.

February 7, 1987
I am exhausted tonight, which means that there is little to say here that can't wait until tomorrow. In two days Ingrid returns from leave, and in four days Dolores and Pauline begin their leave.

February 8, 1987
Today is my mother's birthday, and I've been booked for an over-time night on the 10th, at Al Hada, so these next couple of weeks will see me working pretty steadily. It works out to my advantage though since I had a bit of a '*call for help'* in a letter from my brother asking if I could lend him $1000. By pay-day I should be a decent position to help out.

February 9, **1987**
Ingrid is back! After a month in Britain it is good to see and hear about the world outside this one. It feels a bit like stretching boundaries again, since world news here is practically non-existent. Watching others come and go from holidays gives a certain charge to the time, knowing that each of us will have our spell.


Dolores and Ingrid

February 10, 1987
Gassia has effectively been brushed off so far as her application for transfer is concerned. Through the supervisors she knows at Al Hada, there is still a slim chance though – otherwise she says she will be handing in notice.

February 11, 1987
I finished my night of working over-time at Al Hada, then headed downtown to the souq. Afterwards I caught up with Dolores and Pauline in the throes of packing and leaving for vacation. It will be a month before we see them again. Just before their departure, we gave Gassia her binoculars. She was in tears, and I think, a bit overwhelmed. So we finally did manage to turn the tables on her!

Gassia told Janet and me about her phone call to Al Hada's Director of Nursing, Lorea – who pretty much said that Gassia could be up to Al Hada for work by 23rd February. This seems to contradict everything else we have heard to date. Everything seems to be up in the air again. Now it is nearing 2300 hours, and I must get some sleep. I've been going since early yesterday morning and have to be up by 0600 for day shift tomorrow.

February 12, 1987
Gassia has no more information about the reasons behind yesterday's sudden news, except that all the supervisors at Al Hada seem to believe that she is coming up there by the 23rd.

At Rehab today, the pharmacist, Tarek, has put in his notice for three months. Khalid, an interpreter put in his notice and was gone today.

Meanwhile, the new supervisor is trying to make a 'crackerjack' place out of Rehab by instituting new dressing carts and procedures, when we still aren't allowed more than token soap or paper towels in the bathrooms. Three guesses as to what we are 'supposed' to clean down the trolleys with! On the occasions that paper towels are put into the medicine room or patient bathrooms, an average of four or five towels is allotted to a holder, which very quickly disappears when we are perpetually changing and emptying urine bags, or cleaning up shit.

February 13, 1987
While looking over some of the old memos at work, I found one dated 7 July 1982, from *Paddy Jane Gadsden, SRN, Acting Administrator, Nursing Services, Rehabilitation Centre.* That date means that within two years of becoming a staff nurse and coming to Saudi, she was in charge of this place as one of the sole westerners left here at that time. I wonder when she started calling herself 'Director of Nursing', instead of using her actual title of Acting Director? When all the Westerners started coming?

Hazell keeps treating this place like the kind of acute care hospital that one would expect to find in England. She uses the supplies like there is no tomorrow, with complete faith that more will reappear when and as necessary. I've never seen such a steady supply of paper towels and soap as in the past few weeks and keep wondering what's up. Is this a rearrangement to cover complaints going out and up the ladder to General Linjowee, or are we using up supplies that are supposed to last for months, so that within weeks we will start to run out? Yesterday, Hazell, our supervisor of less than a month's standing, took it into her hands to rearrange all the furniture in the supervisor's office (without askance of anyone else). She also took extra coffee and cups from the cafeteria stores, which is something I have never seen done by any supervisor to date, even when we have run out. Personally, I think she's right, but even Kate would make us re-use disposable coffee cups if we ran out on a night shift.

Hazell does like dropping orders for staff to do various extra duties. (E.g. like telling Kevin to go and clean up the Emergency Room, which, as a staff nurse in charge of the Male II Ward, is definitely not his duty. She then re-reminded him towards the end of shift that he had only a few more hours in which to get it cleaned up. Kevin's reaction was, that it is more in the supervisor's job description that his.)

February 14, 1987
Gassia goes up to Al Hada on February 23rd. According to Lorea, (when Gassia telephoned earlier today) a telephone call to Zahrani elicited the response *'she can go tomorrow if she wants'*.

Also, up at Al Hada, the latest bit of news is that a six-foot stone fence is being built around all the female buildings on the compound with security to be posted at each of the two or three entrances. It will make the females easier to monitor.

February 15, 1987
Today, at 0700, Gassia met with Kate and was informed that she could leave for Al Hada on 21st February. That's six days from now.

More and more, I realize just how much the Filipino staff hate working with Westerners. For one thing, the Westerners tend to work to higher ideals and frequently outwork most of the Filipino staff. My apologies, that's not accurate. There are a lot of exceptionally hardworking Filipinos, and some very lazy Westerners, but the tendency for efficient, caring, properly completed work seems to be on the side of the Western nurses. The tendency among the Filipinos is to adopt an attitude of *'let them get on with it if they want to do extra work'.*

There is another side to this though – that being that most of the Filipinos have been here for several years, and perhaps the lack of ideals and the laid-back attitude is a matter of surviving the long term. The Western staff tend to be far more short term.

On Paeds there is a young girl of about twelve – paraplegic due to spina bifida. I know she absolutely hates some of the Filipino nurses and is not greatly impressed by the rest. Via Gassia's conversations with the girl, it seems that some of the children have actually been slapped about by certain of the Filipino staff. The other Filipinos condone this type of thing by their silence on the issue. (Is this not typical of the servant/slave situation in which they are caught? They stick together to protect their own.)

One never knows where the prejudice factor begins and ends. It is as if we, as Westerners, are considered higher class servants than the Filipinos because we cost more. Do we then act according to what is expected of us, and do the Filipinos do the same? It's a catch-22 situation.

Whenever I am trying to ask questions on a given procedure or policy or approach to a situation, I am constantly given only half the story, or part of the information – and I must work at finding out the rest myself. It is as if I am being perpetually tested to see if I can get into trouble.

I'm absolutely shattered tonight and must pull myself together since I've been booked for another overtime night at Al Hada tomorrow.

I begin to wonder what the difference is between love and infatuation. Relationships out here seem to start and end all the time. My own infatuation (?) with Janet persists. I love her

company. Just to be near her is a treat, but do I want more than that? Having little background experience in relationships, I allow myself my fantasies and leave it be. Besides, she is involved with another – so I listen to the troubles that surround her current relationship and wonder at myself.

February 16, 1987
The latest news today is that, according to Al Hada memos, women are being encouraged to wear veils over their hair when going out in public and nursing caps are being re-instituted. Already Al Hada staff have been issued with them, and it is said that caps will be coming down to Rehab as well.

Evidently, General Linjowee likes the look of them. (Yes, he's still around – and so is Macrabe – so I don't really know what the political situation is up there.)

February 17, 1987
I heard via the grapevine that Paddy's Saudi ex-boyfriend has returned to her, now that he's safely married. Paddy has refused to be number-two wife. I don't know if that means she is or isn't going to continue seeing him or if it is just grapevine gossip.

February 18, 1987
Tomorrow, Gassia moves up to Al Hada. Arrangements have been make for a van to come down and pick up all her stuff. Between Janet, Ingrid and myself, she will have assistance with moving. It will seem quite strange without her on this floor of Rehab Housing.

February 19, 1987
The van arrived at about 0930 this morning to pick up Gassia's belongings. There were four Filipino men to assist in moving her stuff into the van, so just Ingrid and Gassia went up to Al Hada. Already the floor feels emptier.

February 20, 1987
Today was a mellow day, between work and people met and spoken with – the kind of people that make living here less of an ordeal.

Tomorrow, Paddy returns from holidays so that the shifting about of staff will occur again. Gassia is gone. Kate returns to being head supervisor. Hazell is well ensconced in her associate supervisory role – complete with bossiness.

Next month, Janet, Ingrid and I are on nights. It will be a welcome break away from the daily rat-race. Underground tensions still continue to grow however. There is this sense of working with a time-bomb waiting to go off but not knowing how massive or tiny the eventual explosion will be. Can this be the calm before the storm?

February 21, 1987
I must be adapting. At this point, I can scarcely fathom being anywhere else. For all of the current unreality, the only reality is here and now. I had a letter the other day from my cousin Ian, in Taiwan, giving me a sense of future alternatives. He mentioned (in his letter) of work available in Taiwan, teaching English at $10 US per hour, and no need to be a qualified teacher to do so. Considering my current wage is about $7 US per hour, the idea of a much more open, welcoming culture would offer such a great opportunity, as to make me think twice about where I am right now. If I should chose to go Taiwan within the next eighteen months, he has offered to give me an introduction to the place as well. So, I am thinking....

February 22, 1987
What impulse it is that pushes me to get all the bits and pieces I want for gifts for the people I know in Canada, and as soon as I can? There's only one or two small items left to get. I follow my impulses but wonder at their origin.

February 23, 1987
Nothing to add to what has not already been said.

February 24, 1987
Can this be real? I've suddenly realized that, by the time I get my holidays in September, most people here will have had two holiday spells and will be waiting for their third. It seems I have set myself quite a challenge.

February 25, 1987
There's a new girl on the floor – Sylvia. She's Swedish, and otherwise, I don't know much about her except that, as usual (here anyway), no one knew she was coming and she evidently arrived yesterday and saw no one until Ingrid ran into her on the bus coming down from Al Hada this afternoon. She has an open, friendly face, with questioning brown eyes, and short waving brown hair with a straight-forward, genuine approach. We showed her around to the corner shop and tried to give her some kind of a non-committal picture of the idiosyncrasies of the place so that she isn't walking into a completely blank picture frame of the unexpected. Attitudes, likes and dislikes will be her own to acquire over the coming weeks. We tried to give her a feeling of welcome and support. It seems strange to have new blood in the place.

February 25, 1987
We worked short by two staff members on Paeds today. We were half-staffed because there was a sudden phone call from General Linjowee at Al Hada, resulting in one of the Muslim Filipino nurses being called to Riyadh for an indefinite time, to do what-no-one-knows. The rumour is that she is attend to the children of some Royal family member or another. Only a Muslim nurse will be considered, and there are very few of them around – three of them are here, in Rehab, and of those three, two are married. The order came this morning, and the nurse was told that she would be leaving and would not be permitted to refuse the order of the General, which came by way of a Sultan in Riyadh.

Evidently the contract we signed states that we can be moved to any place where the need is greatest. Rehab is already short staffed on every ward, so one less will make little change on that score. I heard that the girl chosen was in tears, not wanting to go. She will be enroute by tonight.

February 28, 1987
It was 1400 hours today when our schedules for tomorrow and the following week appeared. Even then they only cover our hours for the next seven days. Tomorrow I am back onto night shifts for the upcoming month. (I wonder if Kate acquiesced to my request to help keep me out of Paddy's way? She is aware of our personality conflict, and I sense a certain friendship in her.) Janet and Ingrid are also on nights so there will be company between wards which is a rare treat.

March 1, 1987
Kevin has only two weeks left to go in Rehab. He has been officially transferred to Al Hada and Sylvia is his replacement. Her orientation yesterday was a typical mess. She followed the

outpatient nurse around for a few hours and by lunch time, she was told to go home, since there was nothing else for her to do and the place was so busy.

After seeing the rosters for the next month, which gives each staff member an average of twenty shifts each, there are still some fifty shifts to be filled – and Rehab is not short staffed??!! (I am now being scheduled for the same number of shifts as everyone else – averaging 54 hours a week. According to Paddy – as passed on to me by Kate – I seem to be adapting to the place.)

March 2, 1987
When we went on to work last night there were three Filipinos being interrogated in the Administration Offices of Rehab. They were still there when we went off duty this morning. No one knows exactly what they are there for, but I heard rumours about their involvement with Saudi men. Mama Doris, the Egyptian housing administrator, is reputed to be the madam of a prostitute ring, but what has happened to suddenly highlight these activities and cause this public attention, when, most of the time, everyone seems to turn a blind eye to such things?

One of the girls being interrogated is Vicki, the Assistant Housing Administrator in relation to the Rehab Housing compound. She has a room at the end of our floor.

March 3, 1987
A story that is currently circulating regarding the three Filipinos, is that they were being questioned about prostitution. It seems there were photos taken of these girls which show them kissing Saudi men. The pictures had been taken to the Philippines to get developed (they are avid picture takers with their various instamatic and video cameras, and as I have mentioned before, there is a lack of discretion when showing such photos to others). These pictures were brought back into the country, after which they were mailed to friends elsewhere in the country.

As is customary with censorship here (especially with photos or enclosures) the letters were opened. The pictures were intercepted and the subjects of the photographs, which included three female Filipinos from Rehab, were taken for questioning. I doubt if the Saudi men in the photos were put into such a position. The women are now under house arrest – which means they are confined to their rooms and can only leave with security police accompaniment. It is said that the men in the pictures are being searched for, but who knows?

Sylvia has been placed on the worst (i.e. most-challenging) ward in Rehab for her orientation: ILF – Independent Living Facilities. This ward houses thirty-five long-term quadriplegics, who can be absolute bastards in their demands for service. The word Independent is a bit of a joke since their basic ploy is to get away with doing as little as they possibly can for themselves, yet it must be admitted that, even if they did achieve more independence, there is nowhere to go with it. This place is their prison and we are the warders. Wheelchairs don't do well in the desert and would have a hell of time surmounting some of the eight-inch curbs that bound many streets.

One of the patients on ILF wrote a letter to a prince (this is the traditional way of making an appeal for or about anything) complaining that the doctors did not make daily rounds on their ward of extended care patients. Some of the residents have been here several years, and it could be safely assumed that they are not in need of daily doctoring. In fact, many of them have been discharged from medical care, except that there is nowhere to discharge them to. They are simply beyond further rehabilitating. Families tend to desert the individual at this stage for fear that the patients will be dumped on them.

I heard that Sylvia is thinking of applying to go up to Al Hada, because she *'has no rehabilitation experience'*. Unfortunately, this type of information has not influenced anyone before, so I can't see it having much effect. I think I am the only staff member here with actual Rehabilitation background.

I have heard though, that Al Hada is becoming increasingly short-staffed. Just the other day Gassia telephoned and mentioned that there were four more resignations. One girl never returned from her holidays and three others have given six months notice. Whether Sylvia will actually go up there, or whether it was just a rumour that Hazell was creating, remains to be seen.

With the short staffing at Rehab, everyone, including me, is scheduled for twenty shifts for the next month. It seems that Paddy's ire over my 'slave labour' comment has been forgotten.

Today Vicki's belongings were moved from our floor in the residence. I walked past an open empty room after work. Where she actually is, no one here seems to know.

March 4, 1987
My sister's birthday. Happy Birthday Ann.

Rumours state that our housekeeper, Vicki is in Al Hada – held by security. The other two Filipinos who were being questioned are back at work, although still under house arrest. (I was later told that she was sentenced to a whipping before being sent home. The person I spoke with said that there were western witnesses, and that she was allowed layers of clothing to help shield her. It makes one wonder what the damage would have been with no westerners present.)

March 5, 1987
Kate is gone. She left about 1630 for holidays – three weeks in Ireland.

March 6, 1987
Janet and I tried out the squash courts today. It should prove to be an absorbing sideline, to see how good I can get with a few racket games. Maybe I'll buy a tennis racket and badminton racket. It would be good to have some way to wear off excess energy – especially now that the pool is closed. Originally, it had been closed for a week to empty and clean it, but one week is now entering three weeks and the pool remains empty and deserted.

March 7, 1987
Pauline returned last night. I ran into her in the hallway today and was almost bowled over since we weren't expecting her until next Friday. What a treat it is to have familiar faces returning to this very empty floor. Her holidays sound fantastic. It makes me feel that I must go to the south of France someday.

March 9, 1987
I was out on the squash courts after work this morning. I think it will provide a good outlet for energies. Maybe I can use it as an intermediate goal to carry my thoughts away from work. Work only pulls me down, and I need something to override it if I am to stay.

March 11, 1987
Yesterday would be best cancelled from my thoughts, so I'll write it out first. It was pay-day. I went to the bank in the souq, got my money into a draft to sent to the bank in Guernsey, then

mailed my letter without the draft enclosed. Then I discovered I had the wrong account number on the draft, etc. So today, I got all of yesterday's roadblocks sorted out and bought a tennis racket. I decided to try and see how well I can do with my left hand at the tennis, and my right for the squash so I tried a bit of both today. There's not much to boast about either way. Perhaps if I keep up a daily run of this, I'll see if I improve in a week's time – then a month's time. It may provide a suitable obsession for my time here.

March 12, 1987
A short, stocky, attractive black woman came up the floor this morning. She had expressive features, a strong, mid-western, American accent and she was searching out the empty rooms on our floor with the intention of moving from Al Hada to here. She introduced herself as Willa Dean. It seems she works in education department up there – instructing nurses, I believe, and is married to a man who lives in a villa near here. She wants to have an escape room nearer to his place, where (I suspect) she will be spending most of her time. She has gregarious personality, she says she is likely to be moving into room 11 – across the hall from me – or room 12, on Saturday.

The tempo of this place is certainly changing. Ingrid and I walked around to the corner store wondering about 'what next'. One very distinctive feature that Willa possessed, was her startling blue eyes that confronted us directly – as if expecting us to argue with her. It is curious how intrusive each new face feels at first, when we were once such a small, close group, but that has pretty much fallen away now. With Janet off in Jeddah for the weekend, Pauline at work, Sylvia at work, Dolores, Kate and Pam Harris still on holidays, and the two Filipino women away (although they do keep much to themselves, as we do to ourselves during time off) – Ingrid and I are the only ones on the floor today – that is, until we both head off to work this evening. It will be interesting to see how Willa does or does not adapt to this place, since she will be working at Al Hada and often with her husband in the evenings (we think) and not really a part of the Rehab scene. We may not see much of her.

March 13, 1987
The Saudis have files on all Westerners, detailing when we leave, where we go, when we return to the residence, etc. Movements are not secret, but we are perpetually watched. The greater the number of parties we are suspected of, or known to be attending, the thicker the file, and the greater the surveillance. Privacy here is an illusion.

March 14, 1987
Between twenty and thirty percent of the Filipino women at Rehab seem to be pregnant at any one time – with a high miscarriage rate with all the lifting. This is despite the fact that they are hired on a single status (although most are married with husbands working in this country). For the past series of nights I have been working with one woman who is nine months pregnant and ready to drop the child at any time. There is an arrangement whereby, if she suddenly goes into labour, the ambulance will be called, and she will be taken to the emergency at Al Hada. They will not refuse to admit her due to emergency situation. Needless to say, I did not let her lift any of the children last night!

Essentially the Al Hada policy is to refuse to recognise these pregnancies nor to pay the Filipinos for any extra time off. They are allowed up to 14 days of sick pay. If they do deliver in Saudi Arabia, they are usually able to cover themselves by taking their annual leave (which they attempt to plan around their due date) or else they take their full forty-eight days annual leave and aim to return to their own country for the delivery, so that the child has Philippine citizenship. They try to plan to be in the country that they wish to have on the birth certificate of their child.

Some of them want Saudi nationality, since it will give them the right to keep their child with them if they are ever in a position to achieve married status while working in Saudi. Under single status, this is not possible.

Usually they go to the Philippines for the birth, followed by their annual vacation, and they then leave the child with parents or the extended family in the Philippines (whom they are usually supporting financially), and they then return to Saudi to continue to work as a 'single' females. Some parents here have three to six children whom they only see on their 48 days annual leave. It's a peculiar set-up, as is everything else here. It is rare for a Filipino to take short holiday breaks as the Westerners do. They tend to work for their full year after which they get their return flight (which is paid by SCM according to the contract) and 48 days leave. Most Westerners seem to divide up their 48 days into two or three shorter breaks, and when they get their return ticket at the end of a year, they go home for shorter visit.

Speaking with Evan, she explained to me that it is often women in their twenties who come to this country. Many are married, although they do not put that on their application forms for fear of being refused. Often the husband and wife both apply, hoping to get located in the same place. One great fear is that, after the age of thirty, it will become more difficult to carry a child to term, so they are anxious to begin their family here, despite the fact they might never really know their children.

Julie has been here for about 7 years and has 4 children at home who she only sees during her 48-day annual leave. Her husband also works in this country. She describes the expensive house they have bought, and all the wonderful furnishings within it. Her brothers and sisters have raised her children and live in the house. I find it a very strange type of life. Here, she lives in the single female quarters, where she shares a tiny room and works 50 to 60 hours a week. At home she is considered rich.

March 15, 1987
Then, there's the patient who didn't believe his bowel programme had been properly completed and demanded that one the nurses get the nursing supervisor to come to him. He demanded of the nursing supervisor, that she rescue his shit from the garbage to prove that the manual excavation had proved successful. Another patient demanded his shit be shown to the administrator, Mr. Zahrani, to prove its inadequacy. Neither of these demands were followed through despite patient yelling and expressions of anger.

March 16, 1987
The second-floor occupancy expands. There's no visible sign of Willa yet, but in room 12, across the hall from me, a new girl arrived this evening – Susan, from Australia. She headed straight to bed after some twenty-six hours of travel and waiting time without sleep.

Meanwhile, Sylvia is looking into a transfer to Al Hada.

Dolores is back from leave. She returned on the evening of the 14th and has already run into problems. She cancelled some of her leave days with Paddy before going on holiday, yet the work roster shows that she isn't due back at work until the 18th, so no one had cancelled the leave days, despite her request. Typical. I hope she gets it straightened out.

March 17, 1987
I met Willa in town today, and it seems she's decided that the third floor would be quieter. That would make her and Paddy the sole occupants of the third floor. She still hasn't made the move

though. Paddy is still classified as single female, so is not granted a proper flat in the married quarters. Instead, two rooms have been made into one on the third floor, so that she has a bedroom and a sitting room.

Susan is blond and a stylish dresser. She's down-to-earth, has a practical manner and a sense of knowing what she's after. She is a physiotherapist and is being introduced to this place in a typical manner. She began at Al Hada by signing the appropriate papers but not yet issued with uniforms. Then, when she was sent to Rehab, she was asked where her uniforms were.

March 18, **1987**
I saw Willa heading off for work this morning, so she must now be living on the 3rd floor. Paddy and Willa – I wonder if they will see anything of one another.

March 19, 1987
Yesterday there was a raid on building 84, during which many of the Filipinos 'lost' pieces of gold jewellery. The new physio, Susan, lost a silver ring. (?Is Mama Doris behind this?) Rumours fly about. Most of the compounds at Al Hada are regularly raided for home-made booze. Some individuals are already in jail. A real crack-down seems to be happening.

March 20, 1987
Last night we had 3 towels with which to bathe 12 children.

March 21, 1987
No chux – the name we give to the blue plastic lined pads that we use for cleaning up shit, and to pad patients so that we can preserve our scanty supply of linen, etc. The kids on Paeds are now being cleaned up with paper towels, which isn't too bad so long as there are paper towels to be found.

With the adults on Male I, it took Janet twenty minutes to clean a patient, using half a roll of flimsy toilet paper, plus about twelve yards of a waxy type of roll paper, plus a flannel that had to thrown away afterwards. All this was to clean up the loose and vast quantity of shit from one patient after his bowel programme.

March 22, **1987**
The king is in town. Sirens have been going off all day long between there and here. Al Hada is on Gold Alert. (A Gold Alert is like a Cardiac Alert or Fire alert, except it orients around royalty arriving and being in town.) The hospital is rumoured to be the drying-out place of a banqueting 'tub' of a King, who is rumoured to love spirits more potent than befits a Controller of the Two Holy Mosques.

It is hard to know where fact ends and fiction begins. I suspect this may be a Prince that is being talked about – but who really knows?

March 23, 1987
Short staffing persists. Last night was the third or forth night that I have been the sole staff member, putting to bed/ medicating/ feeding the 14 paediatric patients. In truth, there isn't much difficulty about it. One person can carry the night so long as there is a spare set of hands to get the youngsters showered in the morning. That helps me to get to the two tube feeds I need to do and still manage to serve the breakfasts. The place gets busier and tighter for staff members, with full staffing becomes rarer and rarer on all wards.

March 24, 1987
Another rumour has surfaced. Hassan Tajaldeen has now been offered and taken a job at Al Hada so is no longer working at Rehab. I'll believe it when I see it.

March 25, 1987
Dolores was up to Al Hada today, to check on a bone condition involving her teeth and to see if treatment could be had there. All they offered was to extract all her teeth. It is beginning to look like she might have to leave Saudi to get proper treatment.

March 26, 1987
Today was another day of no electricity and no water at the residence. One learns in a hell of a hurry to always keep water in the kettle and a jug or two in the fridge. Earlier, I woke from a dream of walking with my father. Both of us were very, very thin. I heard him saying 'cancer' and I was told I had a couple of months but didn't think it would be that long. I woke up crying.

March 27, 1987
I have another day off tomorrow, and then a night off! After three weeks of getting single nights off, I'm looking forwards to getting two nights of in a row by April. Finally, last night, the chux arrived and we could once again decently diaper and clean the kids. When it comes to showering the smaller children in the morning, we do this on the toilet seat, with a spray nozzle which floods the bathroom, and then seeps out to re-soak the stinking carpet in the clothing room. With the larger children, we shower them on the large shower-seat in the shower booth. The room is so small there is no room to manoeuvre properly. The seat itself is a circle of plastic with a hole in the centre which scares the smaller tots to death, as they're afraid they'll fall through the big hole in the commode-type shower chair.

[*Letters received and sent were like mana-from-heaven and were my basic contact with the outside world and in response, I would write rambling letters home. My mother saved a number of my letters, so I include an excerpt here*.]

> "It was certainly a pleasure to receive your letter the other day. Regular shifts here are working out to 60-hours per week which, if figured out by the 8-hour workweek means we work something like 32 days in 31. So it's a good thing we work 12-hour shifts because it means we get days off. I shall make the year until holiday time but will not guarantee the full contract. If a better option presents itself, I shall take it.
>
> Meanwhile, I am at work now (so what else is new?), and halfway through the night. It was very good to phone you last month (via the telephone souq in Taif, where one can pay for long-distance calls) and actually hear directly that everyone was doing OK. Letters seem a bit distant at times…
>
> I have no time or energy for my writing or drawing spells of the past, but maybe some future day – when this spell is in the past. The best part of it is the friends made here. Since there are so few of us at Rehab (i.e. westerners) we are a close unit for mutual support and practically live in each other's laps between the dormitory setup of housing and being at work a large part of our waking time. I think I've found a few life-time friends here, and that, perhaps, is the richest treasure of this whole spell. I can't say as much for the actual work experience, so I won't.
>
> I still manage to get down to the souq at least a couple of times a month – and few other times for groceries, but it is less and less often these days as energy resources aren't

exactly flaming. But there bits and pieces that give a perk to the day – like buying a pair of jeans for 15 riyals and the shop owner rushing back into the shop to give me a little ‘baksheesh” or small gift, or discount on the price so I come back again. It happens more frequently as faces become familiar at a given shop.

There is an area in the souq where perfumes, oils, incense, etc. is sold via various shops and we have discovered an oil unique to Saudi. I gather that Taif is noted for this scent, which has a lovely small to it, so, for the first time in my life, I find myself in love with a scent and have bought a small vial of the stuff.

Ah well – one more night after tonight and then I have 36 hours off before the next shift, so every gap helps and the days (nights) off are quite mellow between talk, coffee, smokes, etc.

In four days, Janet goes on a month holiday and another of the women has already transferred out of here, having reached her burnout in this ‘Rehab experience’. Another is trying to transfer out, and another is planning on resigning. Everyone openly states that there is nothing here worth contracting for, and so it goes.

But, like all intense spell, there is the challenge of seeing how long one can “hang in there” and I am not regretting my decision to come – it’s just that it will be a relief to reach end of time here and move onto better things. I look forward to doing more with my life than working a place that considers workers “the lowest of the low”. So much for the exotics of the “Kingdom of Saudi Arabia”. It is really as country in its infancy and has a lot of growing up to do – if it ever gets the chance. With the cut in oil prices, it is slipping backwards steadily….

March 28, 1987
It’s amazing how the mind insists on working things out in myriad ways. Based on the sixty-hour work week which we are currently working here (under the banner of so-called 'regular time') I am working 240 hours in this month's roster. If this were divided into so-called eight-hour shifts, it would mean we were working thirty days this month. If we had an eight-hour working day and had to work fifty-six hours a week – we would be working every day without a day off.

Evidently Tajaldeen left because he wasn't being paid the salary of an Assistant Administrator. He is now employed at Al Hada. Meanwhile, the Social Services Director, Suliman Assiri, is being put into the acting position of Assistant Administrator – also without the salary. Rumours (again) have it that Paddy, with her non-experience and non-training is going to eventually be offered that position (i.e. that of keeping all corruption under the control of the corrupt) while Kate will be offered the position of Director of Nursing.

Paddy has told Dolores that she would not OK Dolores' departure from here on an emergency basis to get her teeth fixed. Dolores would have to give the appropriate three-month notice and was needed here, and that her absence would make the place too short staffed. Dolores' teeth have worsened, to the point one is ready fall out and a number are quite loose. The long and short of it is, that Paddy doesn't care about anyone except herself. There is something about the woman that leaves me cold whenever I see her or pass by her – to the point of shivering.

As per usual, the rosters for April aren't yet out, so no one knows what days they'll be working, except, perhaps, Paddy's favoured few Filipinos, who can be guaranteed specific hours and weekends off.

One thing that occurs frequently with patients here, is the presence of a sitter. The sitter is often a family member or maybe a servant who is supposed to help to look after the patient with such things as feeding. And that is about all they do – if that. They sleep on the floor beside or at the foot of the bed, request sheets and other bedding, and are frequently as demanding as the patients, in asking for water, or coffee, or the doctor, or the nursing supervisor, or whatever. They need a doctor's signature for permission to stay (which is something that most families will insist on, or they will get the signature of a local prince to back their request), and we must then serve all their meals as well as the patients' meals. That usually means that they are far too busy eating, to help the person they are sitting for. When a sitter becomes too much of a problem to deal with, the doctor will try to consult with the patient's family and convince them that the patient is not ill enough to require a sitter.

On the Female ward there are almost as many sitters as there are patients. It is not quite so bad on Male I and II. Paediatrics varies according to who the children are, and if their mothers can stay with them. On ILF the patients have been there long enough that they are not supposed to have sitters.

The latest bulletin is that Dr. Fred Lewis has been sighted in Taif.

March 29, 1987
The rigmarole of planning to take a vacation from KSA is amazing.

First, leave must be booked at least two or more months in advance or even earlier if it is a popular time for leave to be taken. Then the leave must be approved. Then the approval gets sent up to Al Hada a month before the actual departure date. After a week or two, once it is approved, 100 riyals must be sent for the exit/re-entry visa. Then the time sheet for the month of leave (showing exact dates of work plus holiday leave) must be signed and sent up, so the salary for the month is ready by departure time.

After that, a few days or a week before departure, transport to Jeddah must be booked for both departure and return, through the Al Hada transport office. A financial release form must be signed by the Director of Nursing, by two witnesses, by the payroll office, by the salaries and benefits office and by the housing office (the last three of which are all situated at Al Hada).

One's paycheque can be picked up (hopefully) a couple of days before leaving, giving one time to get to the bank. The passport is not released until within twenty-four hours of departure – at which time all security forms are re-checked, and the egama is handed in as an exchange for one's own passport, and one is finally free to go.

The booking of and payment for the ticket and the obtaining of all signatures etc. must be done in-between the usual work regime of some fifty-four hours plus a week.

Janet is going through it now, between night shifts, trying to get up to Al Hada, etc., then back here to snatch a few hours sleep before work. She leaves the day after tomorrow and has yet to start packing.

Pauline has a line on a potential job position in Jeddah as an Occupational Technician – with a superb contract, so she is checking things out there.

March 30, 1987
Paddy has supposedly called security to protect her from Dr. Lewis. There has been a lot of running around today, which I shall describe tomorrow morning, since I must now get ready for work this evening.

March 31, 1987
We now have head nurses. To date each ward had a charge nurse rostered for the day or the week, which altered according to changing shifts and changing wards every four months. Our schedules have come out for the first ten days of April, which note that four Filipino staff nurses have been promoted to the position of head nurses. This removes them from the regular staffing numbers – and so increases our staff shortages. We have forty-eight openings, awaiting nurses' aides to work overtime in the next ten days. Some of the aides are working twenty shifts in a row without time off.

Filipino nurses must all be qualified staff nurses in their own country before they can come to Saudi as nurses aides. Some of them then manage to get promoted to the level of certified practical nurse (according to need and their individual work record), and from there, a few manage to achieve the position of staff nurse with a corresponding increase in salary which ranges between 800 riyals a month for the aides and about 2000 a month for the staff nurses. Salaries vary somewhat depending upon when they were first contracted out here and the contract terms under which they were signed.

Kate is back, looking rested and well.

Janet is on holidays – after a series of problems that finally got resolved. Two days ago she went to pick up her paycheque, but it wasn't yet signed, which means it wasn't ready yet. She went up to Al Hada again yesterday (all this occurring after her night shifts, which meant catching to bus to Al Hada right after work and not getting back here until at least noon), but it still wasn't signed. Then she had to wait around and finally created enough fuss about the fact that she was leaving today and needed to get to the bank, etc. – until, at last, the right person arrived and the cheque got its signature. After that she still had to get security to sign the release form, so her egama could be handed in and the passport picked up (which is never released until the day before or else the same day as departure, depending upon the luck of the requesting individual and the whim of the Saudis in charge).

We met Gassia just in time to wave Janet off in the car transport that would take her to the Jeddah airport – and I spent the evening with Gassia. Now, after another day with less than one and a half hours of sleep since last night's night shift, I am quite ready for bed, the time being about 2300.

April 1, 1987
Last night was definitely a good night not to have been at work.

The water in Rehab dwindled down to a mere trickle by midnight. When Ingrid (the supervisor last night) tried to call the maintenance men, the call never got through because the phone was off the hook in the maintenance office. Al Hada hospital was notified, which led to another call to someone, who, about an hour and a half later, showed up at Rehab. After examining the situation, he claimed the pumps were fine but that the water in the water tanks was almost empty. Nothing could be done except to wait for the next day to get more water brought in by trucks, so Rehab had to function on a few trickles of water, which quickly became no water for the rest if the night.

April 2, 1987
Kevin is now working at Al Hada, after some eight months of trying to transfer up there.

Gassia has attempted to contact Dr. Lewis, but he is out of town for the weekend. She left a message for him to call her back. I think she wants him to stir up trouble at Rehab. I gather things are not brilliant at Al Hada, but she is obviously much happier there than she was here.

After visiting Gassia last night, Ingrid and I were waiting for the 2245 transport to carry us back to Rehab and chatting with Gassia at the bus stop of Al Hada.

Across the street, in front of the community centre near the hospital, a woman (in abaya) and a man were talking. On our side of the street, a restless looking security man, in khaki coloured uniform, was pacing back and forth. After about five minutes, he crossed the street and went over to the couple. Seconds later the girl walked off. The security, meanwhile, was phoning up his boss to report the incident.

The bus picked us up, and as we rode off, the security official and the man were still talking/ arguing, looking as if they were going to come to blows. Single men and women are not supposed to be seen together in any way outside of the working situation.

April 3, 1987
The farcical ward known as ILF (Independent Living Facility) now holds thirty-seven patients. Most of them are quadriplegics. Many of them are doubled up in single rooms. The staff quota on this ward is about half of that scheduled for other wards, since (theoretically) these patients have been rehabilitated and have acquired a limited degree of independence.

The reality is that these patients have become more demanding than ever. They act as if the nurses are their personal servants. Today, when the ward was asked to work short by one staff member, the nurses on the ward refused to work at all unless their quota of nine staff was maintained. It is the first time that the Filipino staff have made such a stand in my time here – so even they are being pushed past their limits. Nurses' aides are still the only ones allowed to get paid for overtime beyond the scheduled nineteen or twenty shifts in a month, and they are not particularly anxious to put in their overtime on ILF, where the patients are so demanding that the staff tends to be run ragged. Whenever a nurse does try and get a patient to do something that he is capable of himself, the patient, like a spoilt child, puts in a complaint to the nursing supervisor, or to Paddy, or to Zahrani. The patient ends up being catered to or pacified and the nurse reprimanded.

April 4, 1987
There are now five head nurses in Rehab: One each for Male I, Male II, Female Ward, Paediatric Ward, and ILF. All of these individuals were gathered together on April 1st, and suddenly told they were to become head nurses, to help *'straighten the place out'*. They have been promised a pay increase that has not yet been given the OK by Al Hada administration. So, on top of their new roster of nine-hour shifts, five days a week, they must work a few extra hours so that they can maintain their usual salary. How this will work out, no one knows.

These particular staff nurses were chosen because, according to Paddy, they had been here and exploited the longest. So what does this situation do to them? Exploit them twice as much?

Meanwhile, in making out the rosters for 11-30 April, Rehab has space for 176 overtime shifts for nurses' aides. Many are already putting in 25 shifts per month as it is.

Of course, by exploiting the Filipinos as head nurses, their wage increases will likely be minimal. It is a good financial move, as is using the aides for overtime, which only costs 25 extra riyals per shift. I wonder if it has also been done to try and keep the Westerners more subordinate.

April 5, **1987**
This must be what is known as my six-month-low. Attempting to find any source of energy in me is difficult. Even to walk across the room – let alone conceive of doing something calls for energy. Ingrid has heard (via Gassia) that there is a weekend bus trip organised through Al Hada that goes to Jeddah every week, if more than eight people are interested in going. Ingrid and I are considering it for the weekend of the 23rd. It will be good to see something beyond this small circle of Taif. Getting away from this area after six months of Al Hada, Rehab and the souq sounds like a breath of fresh air.

April 6, 1987
Dolores has managed to rearrange her plans. She has discovered there is a periodontist in the Kingdom – a Saudi professor at the University Hospital in Jeddah. She will be going there on 27th April to see what he has to say. If treatment can be done here, she will continue working at Rehab with trips to Jeddah for the treatment of her teeth. She has been told that if treatment starts immediately, she can save them from falling out.

Under my door this morning I found a note indicating that Helen Zeigler (the woman in Canada, through whom I was hired to work here) will be at Al Hada today. Tonight, I plan to go up and join with the other Canadians here, to see what will come of this gathering of the people she recruited. It will also be interesting to see any other Canadians who are here.

I have returned. I never made it to see Helen Zeigler. I heard that her appearance at the coffee evening didn't happen until after 2200 hours, so my stopover to visit Gassia at Al Hada, which lasted until just after 2100 hours, ended up being an enjoyable visit with a good friend.

The half-planned Jeddah weekend is off. It turns out that on the trip last weekend, the driver got arrested before the trip was even underway. Supposedly, he was doing these trips on the side, although he was hired elsewhere. It seems he and another man ended up in jail and the full story is still unknown. No one made it to Jeddah last weekend and the package deal arranged through the Casablanca Hotel in Jeddah is no longer a reality to look forward to.

April 7, 1987
Gassia has spoken with Dr. Fred Lewis on the telephone. It turns out he is not working in Taif but has simply returned for Haj and will be leaving in a few days, BUT he has written letters to the king and few princes, trying to start proceedings against Rehab. We will have to wait and see if anything ever comes of that.

Gassia sees a lot of Mavis and Andre these days. They have become very good friends. Both Andre and Gassia have a passion for interesting, good food, so when they start talking and comparing notes it can be hilarious. Mavis seems to be enjoying the escape from the regiments of working life. Between them they continue to collect various Bedouin artefacts and jewellery. I've recently bought a couple of Bedouin necklaces and I'm fascinated with them.

April 8, 1987
The endless work in this atmosphere of exploitation and servant/slave attitudes towards nursing staff tends to eat away at the very soul, until work energy is in a negative balance and one tries to do the minimum that is essential, and stretch it out as long as possible. This is how the Filipinos have managed to survive their long-term employment here. Life enthusiasm is low. How long I will be able to keep pushing myself in this atmosphere becomes more and more questionable.

April 9, 1987
I was talking with Linda, one of the Filipino nurses, last night. She's a tiny, slightly plump, motherly figure, with round face and round glasses. She was saying that she had heard of Saudi women who ended up as prostitutes. They make their move by diving into parked, unlocked Saudi cars when the drivers are absent, so those who aren't interested make sure the car doors of the back seat are locked whenever they leave their cars.

Kevin is now in Al Hada and much happier there, although he says they are also about 50 staff nurses short of full level. He never did pay me for the extra half shift I worked for him.

Another point of note: the Mutawas carry whips in their hands and can be seen literally driving their flock into prayer.

When the Al Hada staff were originally housed in residences in Taif (Building One used to be such a residence, although it now houses Saudi families) a memo was circulated through the residences, requesting that the staff living on the lower floors of these buildings to keep their curtains perpetually drawn and their windows closed. They were causing accidents along the streets in front of their open first floor windows. It seems that Saudi men couldn't keep their eyes on the road, anticipating what they might see through the open windows.

Our current residences are set along a main road about a mile outside of the town. There are two female buildings spaced well away from the married buildings. Our section is completely surrounded by a wall/ fence – concrete alternating with metal slates. This place is also built on a hill, so that the wall essentially prevents entry, plus its location and height allow for privacy so that we can open windows and curtains without interference.

April 10, 1987
Evidently Dr. Fred Lewis walked into Rehab for afternoon '*sela*' (prayer) the other day. He walked calmly past the security and administration, only to be escorted out by security afterwards.

The swimming pool is finally back in commission, after more than six weeks of being closed for cleaning.

April 11, 1987
I worked with Kate as my assistant on Paeds last night. She figures that, between sick time, overtime, holidays, and under-staffing the wards, we are still averaging a shortage of twenty full-time staff members a month. Not bad for a 100-bed institution.

Ingrid has returned from her Riyadh weekend looking great.

April 12, 1987
Ingrid has been promoted to nursing supervisor. She actually came here as a head nurse, but at that time there were no head nurses at Rehab, so she became acting supervisor. Now that the Filipino nurses have been made head nurses, she more-or-less had to be promoted to the position she has filled for the past year.

Last night, the shortage of staff was such, that I worked Paeds alone – including showering eight handicapped children in the morning, dressing them all, giving their breakfasts and caring for the two bedridden tube feed patients etc. All wards worked short last night. This is now routine. Rehab always averages a shortage of at least three staff members a night. Last night we were down by five or six.

There were only two towels available to wash all the kids, so I pulled out the four-foot square flannels that do as blankets and used those as well. The dirty linen I laid on the floor to mop up the flood of water that seeps into the hall carpet from under the wall and out the door. (The communal bathing/clothing room is actually a bedroom with an adjoining bathroom. The shower section and the toilet section have been set up with spray hoses to wash the larger and smaller children respectively, and the rest of the room has the clothes, diapers and space in which to dress them.)

April 13, 1987
Rehab is working short by seven to twelve staff members each twenty-four-hour spell – despite the fact that there are always three to four overtime aides pitch-hitting on various wards. As of the 11th of this month, CPNs are officially permitted to work overtime, but this scarcely touches the needs of the place. The nursing aides are becoming more frequently ill after working twelve to fourteen day stretches without a break and cannot keep up the pace.

April 14, 1987
I've been running into problems with my tennis practise. (Not that I call any of this running about with the racket a '*game'*. It more a case of hitting or not hitting and running after balls.) I get shooting pains running through my wrists and up my arm every time the racket hits the ball. I tried strapping my wrists this morning. I have no such problems with badminton or squash but figure it's because of having broken my right wrist as a child and it was not completely aligned when it set. With badminton and squash my wrist moves more flexibly, but holding it stiff, as in tennis, it can't take the pressure of hitting the ball.

April 15, **1987**
A letter from Anne Rayvals yesterday demanded more *atmosphere* about my life here. Atmosphere no longer hits me as anything unusual or strange after several months of daily living in residence, and walking out for shopping, going to work, chatting to friends in their rooms or mine, or going for a quick swim in the usually vacant pool, or hitting a ball around the courts – which are also, usually empty. The newness and freshness of explanations and curiosity came within the first month or so. Afterwards things grew quickly into familiarity and habit.

She asked me what I eat. I don't eat too differently from what I have eaten for years now, being essentially vegetarian. Rice is available everywhere. Rolled oats tend to be more expensive so I buy the cracked wheat instead and sometimes dried beans or peas. Vegetables such as onions, cabbage, green beans, small, sweet cucumbers and tomatoes are a standard in most shops. In the souq, little vegetable stalls pop up between other stalls, spilling their produces out towards the sidewalk. There are open displays with crates of carrots, cucumbers, tomatoes, mint, parsley, plus fruits such as oranges (of many varieties from green to mandarin – from large to

small – all very sweet), apples (usually red or green delicious), a variety of dates (mushy, dry, red, brown, yellow, some very sweet, some more chewy). There are in-season imports of quince, figs, green grapes, melons, etc.; also fresh okra, green almonds, etc. – everything from the common to rarer and more expensive items. I tend to stay with the more common items of cucumbers, beans, tomatoes, and cabbage. Since our rooms only have a small hot plate for cooking and I have only one eight-inch cooking pot, my staples are rice, cracked wheat and vegetables. On rare occasions we have a communal type of meal, using the stove in the communal kitchen just off the lounge.

I also buy hot sauce, which is a bit like Tabasco, based on the cayenne pepper. It is an import from the southern US.

French fries are a great favourite in almost any place where food is served – at Rehab, at the cafeteria at Al Hada, at the eating places in the souq, which we so rarely go into. The standard meals of the Saudis seem to be fatty lamb, or goat or chicken (or all three) served in bed of buttery rice. There are occasional fish imports, but these seem to be more a favourite of the Filipinos. I have seen one place in the souq where chickens are very fresh (which means still running around) so you can choose your own and go home with it still warm. Eggs, of course, are widely available.

There's also cheese. It is to be found in huge pieces in cheese shops, or else cut down to size and packaged in the supermarkets: Cheddar, Edam, Gouda, Danish, Feta – all of varying prices. There is a white cheese, which is a bit like Tofu, but with more flavour (Haloumi?). Natural yoghurt is popular (being less bitter than the kind I've tasted in Canada), and Labneh - a very thick, textured, high butterfat echo of yoghurt. Laban is a drink, which tastes a bit like buttermilk.

The indoor shops – grocery stores – supermarkets – remind me of the old five and dime stores or the country grocery stores in Canada, with everything crammed in as tightly as possible. The floor to ceiling items are sectioned off in areas of soaps, tissues, canned goods, breads, cookies, candies (most of these imports from Britain or the US), a very small frozen food section (usually containing meat or ice cream), and a refrigerated section with cheeses, cold drinks, milks, and a few of the more common vegetables and fruits. Another part of the store will carry everything from pots and dishes to cutlery, perfumes, paper and envelopes, pens and thread, makeup and almost everything imaginable.

Bread is cheap and fresh daily. My favourite is the Arabic bread – very thin large circles of soft flat brown or white bread. When toasted it has the texture of a thin, crisp cracker. Pita bread of the slightly thicker variety, as I have seen in Canada, is also available. There are bread rolls and small, sweet muffin-like buns. I like to buy the muffin-buns as a snack as they are a bit like a doughnut for sweetness, costing a riyal or two each. The Arabic bread, when fresh, can be used as a scoop or spoon when eating the stew-like dishes of rice and vegetable. It can also be rolled up with soft spreading cheese and cucumbers or tomatoes etc. for a novel sandwich.

Our favourite grocery store is *the shop around the corner* – actual names are lacking in our vocabulary due to our illiteracy in Arabic – where we are recognised with a sense of welcome. There are two Pakistani men who seem to be the main workers there. They often discount our shopping by a riyal or two. Occasionally they offer some *baksheesh* (which means we get something extra thrown in). I once received a baby feeder cup, and once a mini sample of cologne. The main thing is that we are recognised with a smile, and that is a treat.

Another store we tend to frequent is larger, with even more variety. We call it *the store across from the big mosque*, since it is right across the street from one of the largest mosques in our corner of Taif – not far from Building One where the bus to and from Al Hada stops. Walking distance, it is about a thirty-five-to-forty-minute walk from Rehab, while another ten-minute walk beyond brings us to the edge of the souq. If we can't find something anywhere else, we can usually find it or a near substitute in *the store across from the Mosque*.

Hidden in the winding maze of the souq, there are some small, take-away food places that we notice but do not go into (being foreigners and women). In the mornings we see such places that look like dark rooms with people grouped on the floor eating from bowls filled with a thick bean and gravy-like stew – scooping it from the bowls with large chunks of bread. The dish is called *fool* and we have tried it when Gassia made it for us (she loves the mid-eastern cuisine and has been a great teacher to us explaining in ingredients and habits).

Another stall sells large, round, pricked loaves of bread – being about eighteen inches in diameter and ranging from half an inch thick for the crispier, biscuit-like loaves to almost one inch thick for the more bread-like loaves. These are twirled into rounds, pricked, and by mean of a huge spatula-like device, slapped to the walls of deep concrete ovens. From the street, these ovens look like large holes in what seems to be a concrete counter – the holes opening into deep round ovens with a fire at the bottom. It is fascinating to watch the facility of those who make the bread, slap it into the ovens and then scoop out the round loaves when done.

At one place, not far from Building One is a small stall known as the Falafel/ Shawarma shop. This one has a modern, clean look and is popular with staff from Al Hada and Rehab. The Shawarma are made from beef, chicken or lamb cooked on a huge upright spit. Numerous slivers of meat are cut from the outside and placed on a flat round of Arabic bread. Condiments such as pickles and tomato are added, and it is rolled up into a tubular type of sandwich. Falafels are made from deep-fried round balls, made from a mixture of chickpeas and mushy peas. With hot sauce, mayonnaise, tomato slices and dill pickles put onto a piece of Arabic bread, with three of these Falafel balls placed securely on top and the whole thing is then rolled up. The place also sells fresh squeezed orange juice and a variety of other juices. It’s an Arabian version of the Canadian hot dog stand.

This covers most of what I have experienced regarding the food in Taif. At Rehab, dishes such as *foul* (pronounced ‘fool’) are sometimes served at breakfast. French fries are a favourite with chicken or some other meat as a lunch or supper. *Halvah with pistachios* is one of the favoured sweets. Occasionally one patient or another will order in a traditional meal of fatty lamb buried in greasy rice.

Beyond that, there is much that we miss – much not known, since we are essentially walking the edge of this society.

April 16, 1987
More and more, I compare this country to the Middle Ages. The king, princes, princesses and sultans are of the aristocracy and do exactly as they please. Via Ingrid, whose friend has dealings with certain princes, their access to liquor, women (i.e. *what nationality of woman would you like for the evening?*), etc., has them acting as a law unto themselves. The power is divided between the aristocracy, and the Mutawas – the religious power. The two are supposed to combine in the person of the king. The general populace seems to be ruled by religious propaganda, but this is not so different to the attitudes I have found in our so-called Christian country – the attitude that *I/we are right and everyone else is wrong and unsaved and doomed.*

Ramadan nears, relating to the fast of Mohammed before his pilgrimage. My sources are scanty and not necessarily correct, but this is how I have heard it described from a few Westerners and Filipinos who have been in this country for some years. What a pity that the Saudis themselves are not proud enough of their heritage to be willing to teach and explain about some of the things that we find so different. Perhaps there are those who do try and explain, but it has not been my experience to find someone who will. I suspect that being a foreign female is part of the barrier.

In Ramadan, for about thirty days (a month), everything in Saudi turns upside down. I gather the actual start of Ramadan occurs with the first sighting of the new moon (or non-sighting if it isn't really visible through the cloud cover) and cannons and guns are shot off to notify the beginning of fasting. From then on, during the daylight hours between sunrise and sunset (the timing varies somewhat year to year according to a lunar calendar that dates from the birth of Mohammed, which means we are now in the year 1405 or something like that) no food or drink is supposed to pass the lips. A truly devout Muslim will not even swallow his own spit. At sunset, the call to prayer comes out, after which the feasting begins and the everywhere is alive and awake until sunrise when first call to prayer of the day signifies a return to another day of fasting.

When sunset first arrives circles of men and friends form for the traditional pouring and sharing of Arabic coffee (a thick, sweet, cardamom-flavoured mixture) poured into small cups and accompanied by dates which are a traditional offering at the breaking of the fast. Masses of Bedouin families gather with their children in the night streets and a general sense of a party atmosphere prevails. Then, they roll up in mats on various street corners for sleep.

Shops are open until 0200, with only the bank and a few grocery stores opening for a few hours around 0900 or 1000. The post office goes into stasis, and I have heard stories of bags of mail that have accumulated to the extent that, after Ramadan, they can't all be loaded onto the planes. The excess overflow is said to be burned.

All this is due to begin at the end of this month and carry through until the beginning of June. At the end of Ramadan there is a Christmas-like atmosphere of gifts being exchanged and dressing up and further celebration.

April 17, 1987
Paddy has made a plea to Al Hada for more staff, where they are also dramatically short staffed. At Al Hada, however, they pay overtime to staff who work more than forty-eight hours a week. It seems that staff nurses at Rehab are not ‘allowed’ to do overtime work (even when it happens involuntarily because of the way the rosters are made out). The CPNs and nursing aides here are all working flat out and we are still short-staffed. Perhaps there is an advantage to Gassia working at Al Hada. She has worked here and knows more about the inside story of this place, while the westerners up there are mostly ignorant of Rehab issues. Unfortunately, Al Hada has its own series of problems and difficulties, and that is now Gassia's first priority.

April 18, 1987
Dolores and Serge (her boyfriend) got stopped by the police the other night. They were returning to the French Compound after being out drinking. They got off with a warning, but it was a close call.

Dolores has another dental appointment in Jeddah tomorrow. She needs someone to go with her – as an escort (since she may be a bit groggy after treatment) so I shall go along for the ride. I gather transport has been booked to take her out and back.

April 20, 1987
Yesterday proved more interesting than anticipated. At 0900 hours, Dolores and I began our day with the hospital transport arriving to take us on the two-hour journey to Jeddah. We sat in the back seat of the air-conditioned car, driven by a courteous, but distant, Arab driver. There were two other occupants of the car who carried on Arabic conversations with the driver.

Taking the escarpment route out of Taif, we descended through the rocky, barren, mountainous pass by steep switch-back roads. From there the country quickly became flat and the tarmac road ran straight into the far distance with flat countryside on both sides. A few rocky hills in the distance looked like sudden, erratic mounds placed whimsically from above. The land on either side of the highway was squared into half acre patches surrounded by earth dikes, two to three feet high, which acted as fences corralling scrawny camels in a patch of brown scrub, or irrigated into a thick patch of lush green grass, or, most often, empty and barren. Once or twice I saw beige-white tents in the distance, that I guessed to be nomadic family dwellings. And of course, amongst it all were the omnipresent mosques, rising into tall, slender towers, topped by the crescent moon. They stood out sharply against the sandy browns and reds and seemed to placed frequently enough, that there was always one or another in sight. About halfway between Taif and Jeddah we stopped at a check point and our egamas were examined. This is a regular procedure.

Jeddah grew suddenly around us, preceded by various billboards advertising hotels, shops and businesses. We suddenly discovered the driver had no intention of taking us to the Abdul Assiz University and claimed he had not been told to go there. Evidently this was the regular transport that was supposed to take people leaving for holiday to the Kaki Hotel or the airport in Jeddah, and to pick up those at the hotel who were waiting to return to Taif after their holiday.

After being dropped off at the hotel, we also discovered that no return transport had been booked for us. We decided to deal with first things first. With the assistance of the hotel reception, we caught a limousine taxi from the hotel to the dental clinic at the university, arriving ten minutes late. An hour later, after her first treatment was finished, Dolores and I stopped at an outdoor seller of coffee and take-away food for some lunch. We sat on some nearby steps and reassessed our position while appreciating the more open and casual atmosphere of the university. It was a relief after Taif. By then it was 1300 hours, and we knew from others who had travelled by local buses, that the Saptco Bus Company travelled daily between Taif and Jeddah. First, we needed to get back to the Kaki Hotel near the centre of Jeddah, where we knew they would provide us with transport to the buses.

We walked over to the security cubicle at the entrance to the university grounds and tried to wave down a cab. After a few attempts with no success, we found out from the security official at the gate that no driver knew exactly where the Kaki Hotel was and they didn't want to drive out of their local area. With the help of the official, and with some relief, we finally found a taxi to take us to the Kaki Hotel. Once there, we sat in the lounge trying to unwind from the tensions of the day. We then caught another taxi to the Saptco Bus Station on the Cornish. It was near the central shopping area of Jeddah – the area that I had visited on my first night in the country.

We discovered the next bus to Taif didn't leave until 1830. We had a two and a half hour wait, so, after purchasing our tickets, we wandered around a few of the modern near-by shops,

bought a few tapes, had another quick drink at a Wimpy Bar (a British-based fast-food chain), then headed back to the bus station. We both counted our good fortune in deciding to take extra money with us, since cab fares and taxis had cost us over 70 riyals apiece – which didn't include the thirty riyals each for the bus trip back to Taif. The return trip took three hours and landed us not too far from Rehab in Taif. Another quick taxi trip and we finally arrived back here at 2140. A thirteen-hour day to attend a one-hour dental appointment.



Dolores

I enjoyed the day a lot. After the initial shock of knowing we were on our own, we took things step by step and let the day carry itself. To be able to sit at a table drinking a cup of coffee in a Wimpy Bar, in downtown Jeddah, was that special touch of more western atmosphere that I have missed so very much. Such a sense of freedom is not available in Taif. The freedom to relax and wander without constantly being pointed at or jeered and sworn at. A treat of a day.

This morning I found out from Kate that transport is only provided to take people to the airport or on work related trips. So far as the future of Dolores' dental appointments go, she will have to figure out her own way in and out.

Another thing I've heard; that the fasting of Ramadan is supposed to impress upon those fasting the awareness of what it is to starve – to work and to be without enough to eat and drink. Theoretically people are supposed to continue with their usual work during the fasting month – not stop work and turn the clock around.

This reminds of Muslims I have met in Canada, who fasted and worked and were willing to explain why the fasting was important. I now wish I had been in a position to ask more questions. It seems that Ramadan here has gone through the same kind of transformation that Christmas has in the Western world. The true meaning is present but often hidden.

April 21, 1987
My youngest brother's birthday. Happy Birthday Lloyd.

So much for all the racket sports that sounded so good in my imagination. Between Ingrid and I, we are lucky if we can amass the energy for three mornings a week after work and maybe once between. I manage to swim about twice a week, and of course, we walk to the souq a couple of times a week. Work somehow interferes with the rest of our great plans. Ah well. This morning's 'zombie' knock-about with the birdie, battling against a full wind, was fun for the laughter and for being out and moving about, even if most of our running about was to retrieve the birdie from some stray position on the tarmac or another.

April 22, 1987
I just found out that my sister, Ann Marie, is now two months pregnant with her IUD still in situ. I suspect this was the source of a spell of worrying about her. Last month my worry had reached such a degree that I made a phone call to Canada on March 10th (at the Telephone Souq) – at which time she told me that she and the kids were just getting over the flu. She was probably about 2 weeks pregnant but not yet aware of it. I get the sense that things are all right now.

I got back here after work this morning to find no electricity or water. I gather things have been this way since last night. It makes a good excuse to take advantage of this by defrosting the little refrigerator. Its tiny freezer space has almost disappeared in ice accumulations – and there is nothing in the fridge that will spoil if given a day on the counter.

April 23, 1987
Ingrid and I visited Al Hada's Female pool after work this morning. It is a lovely set-up, although somewhat inconvenient for Rehab residents to get out-to and back-from. It is only open between 1000 and 1900 hours and closed for lunch hour between 1300 and 1400 hours. The after-work bus from Rehab placed us up there by 0900 so we waited around for an hour – then spent about an hour and a half at the pool. Following that we visited the staff cafeteria for lunch – they actually provide meals for the staff there! The cost was quite reasonable too.

After lunch, we walked through the almost deserted community centre. It’s a huge building with a couple of Filipino staff present, but no one seemed to be able to tell us much about the place. We did find out that there were men's days and ladies days – this even included access to the library. The library seems to run on erratic hours – open when the librarian is present, closed during prayer times, mealtimes, coffee breaks and when the librarian is elsewhere. The library itself is just a large room. It did seem to have one or two books on most topics, but nothing that caught my eye as interesting. Afterwards we waited around for the 1410 bus back to rehab, getting back here about 1500 hours.

There is only the one bus that commutes to Rehab between 1130 and 1700 hours.

April 24, 1987
The shortage of staff has finally broken down the resistance various administrators, and we, as staff nurses, are now permitted to work overtime.

I have decided to work an extra shift on top of my 60-hour work week. More than ever, I sense that this year will prove to be my limit out here and I would like to have the opportunity to spend a bit of money here as well as save.

April 25, 1987
I shall walk into the souq this morning, for the sake of a coffee space away at the Assiz Hotel, then maybe a swim this afternoon, then work tonight. Only five more shifts before another month is tucked away. Only three and half months before holiday time. Within two months I hope to have enough saved for the painting I want to do. I am seriously considering resigning by holiday time and maybe checking out the Taiwan option for a year rather than staying another year here. After that, who knows?

April 26, 1987
So many staff members are leaving Al Hada, that the situation up there is becoming as difficult as down here (or so I gather from Gassia). At any rate, the Director of Nursing, Lorea, has evidently not been keeping General Linjowee up to date on things (according to him) and he claims he was not aware of the staffing problems. Someone has complained to Riyadh about the lack of communication between staff and higher-ups and the general lack of support. Someone is being sent from Riyadh to check up on the situation here.

Patients at Rehab are complaining about their treatment, so duty officers are supposed to be coming down from Al Hada to hear and check out these complaints. The patients are the ones who say what does or doesn't go here. A few patients have the power of knowing a prince and use this power when they feel they aren't getting their own way. Eventually they get just what they want – and they have few illusions about Paddy or Zahrani.

Rumour has it that the week-long vacation Zahrani was supposed to have taken during this past week, was to go to Riyadh to be questioned about this place. Oh yes – and Paddy has just confirmed a rumour that has been floating around the place. She says she will definitely be leaving at the end of her contract in mid-December.

April 28, 1987
Janet returned from leave at 0230 this morning. She knocked on my door when I got back from work and greeted me with a big hug. It is good to see her again.

Last night at approximately 2330, Ramadan started. There was a festival-like anticipation in the air. The daily fasting begins as of today – except, of course, with the children. I've found out that young children and those who are ill are exempt from the fasting, so Paeds has the curious situation happening where of all their sitters are fasting and being fed in the middle of the night, while the children are being fed according to their usual daily schedule.

I have discovered that in two days, I will begin a four-month stint of work on ILF. I will remain on night shift. Shops are now closed for most of the day, with some opening for a couple of hours between 1000 and 1200. Thank heavens for that few hours, or else it would almost be impossible to buy food when working nights. Tonight I will do an overtime shift. It means working

five in a row up to the end of the month, but I am hoping that there will be a night off at the beginning of the next roster – although the rosters are not yet out for the next month.

April 29, 1987
Rosters are out. My gamble on next month's working shifts was slightly miscalculated. With my extra shift last night, I shall be working eight in a row then get one off and am then back on again for five more shifts. Oh well. At least the week will pass quickly. ILF isn't quite as bad as reputation has marked it to be. While listening right now to a Beatles' song, *It's Been a Hard Day's Night,* I mentally agree. I'd asked to be told early if they needed me for overtime last night, since I don't go to bed on my off day. Instead I was notified late, so only managed a couple of hours sleep before shift. With this new roster, Kate and Janet will also be on nights during the up-coming month so at least there will be some chance to see a westerner at break. With Ramadan happening, the patients don't go to bed until between 0400 and 0600; well after the morning prayers.

The thirty days of Ramadan are followed by a celebratory ten days of Eid – true holiday celebration. During this spell everything is supposed to be unpredictable and chaotic, and I have been advised to stock up on food before Eid since store openings are completely unpredictable. That means this spell of Ramadan and Eid will continue until 6th June.

April 30, 1987
As of today, each day begins a countdown until our hiring company, Saudi Charter Medical, reaches the end of its contract phase on 29 April 1988. People are now coming out on one-year contracts so as to coincide with SCM's contract end date. Near that time there will be bids put in by various in-country companies to run the place, and from what I can gather, innumerable rumours about what is and is not happening.

May 1, 1987
I've worked six nights and called in sick tonight. I feel totally worn out with the perpetual demands placed on staff in this place, by both patients and the administration.

May 2, 1987
I've got myself onto a downer. The more work one does at Rehab, the more that is asked of one. On nights, we are already feeding the thirty-six ILF patients at the beginning of shift and again at 0330, plus giving out two to three rounds of medications during that time trying to rebalance their usual daily medications, then putting patients to bed steadily from midnight until after prayers at 0530 – with no increase in the night staff and rarely the time for even a fifteen-minute break until 0630 – ten and a half hours after starting work.

I was doing some mental recalculations. I could actually earn more money for less work and with greater benefits if I chose to work these kind of hours in Canada. That is, if the money is all I'm after.

My only outings from Rehab consist of walks to the souq and back. The Al Hada bus transport is unreliable, infrequent, and basically oriented around the staff up there. Often, the scheduled bus stops at Rehab are missed, depending upon the mood of the driver.

It is only the staff at the main Al Hada compound, who also have proper access to the various outings organised from there. Here, our extra-curricular activities consist of the use of an un-private swimming pool (overlooked by the married-quarters apartment units which house both western and Arab couples, so that all sun-bathing, swimming must be done with extreme

modesty) and deserted tennis courts. I'm seriously considering handing in my three-month notice by the end of this month.

May 3, 1987
So much for the abundance of overtime that will suddenly be available. The latest decision states all overtime will be sparing allocated – allowing those of lowest salary first chance and so on up the scale. Only half shifts will be permitted to cover the busiest spells of work. From any reactions I've heard to date, even the aides feel it is hardly worth their while to come in for half a shift. Many are cancelling the overtime they had put their names down for. My reaction is *good for them*. The shorter staffed we are, the less we can do, and it is the patients who will have to complain. Those in charge are quite happy to exploit the staff to the fullest degree possible. It is only the staff themselves that can draw the line. We are only contracted for 48-hour weeks. After that we are within our rights to have resting time.

Kate says that the staff sit down too much in between running around, yet she had not yet put in a run of shifts working on the wards (especially ILF), so has only a vague idea of the mental exhaustion that wears us down. More and more is being asked of the staff without any visible return, except an occasional verbal or written comment saying how much it is 'appreciated'.

Everyone may be willing to pull together in a crisis, but when the crisis becomes a habit that never ends, the willingness fades. The individual reserves of being able push oneself and to offer more begin to dwindle dramatically.

May 4, 1987
The mood of the past week blows away like a dark cloud passing. It was the lowest and most prolonged spell I've hit yet. Many more like that and I will have to leave.

May 5, 1987
I just had another night of being told by Kate how to nurse, how to arrange this incredibly busy ward and how to take my breaks. I should like to see her handle this ward as a charge nurse for a few weeks and see just how easy she finds it. I will be handing in my notice within the next week.

May 6, 1987
There are two new women on the second floor at the residence. I saw them in passing, although I do not know their names yet. They are Egyptian. One is a pharmacist and one a speech pathologist.

The hours on ILF have been changed and staffing altered to give an illusion of more staff. We go to work an hour earlier and get off an hour earlier. This means starting at 1800 hours and finishing at 0600. It also means that I lose the only good break I got – time to recoup my resources at 0630. It also limits my chance to see people here, in residence, since I leave an hour before anyone else goes to work and get back here an hour before they finish shift. It is amazing how these things are figured out without consulting with any of the staff involved, to find out what their ideas and reactions might be.

May 7, 1987
I've developed a whopper of a cold but will not complain. I dropped into the doctor before leaving work this morning and obtained a sick note for tonight.

May 8, 1987
Another staff nurse has arrived. She's from Ireland. Martina is a petite, almost stocky – a fair girl with fragile skin and a scattering freckles across her nose. Her manner is forth-right. She was incensed at the high-handed treatment she received at the airport, when she was herded with a few other girls into a vacant corner and told to wait. They waited for five hours. Eventually, she was dropped off here in the usual manner – with no introduction to anything – while the others went on to Al Hada. She and the tall Sylvia seem to be teaming up which is great since Sylvia's day shifts have meant that she is often alone.

Another night off sick.

May 9, 1987
I went down to employee health (at the Centre) and got tonight off as well. I've once again decided I need to mail all the little gift items, now accumulated into a box in my room. They are too heavy to consider carrying with me when I leave. I shall pack them more securely.

May 10, 1987
Janet and I visit back and forth regularly between our rooms. We keep trying to figure out how to get out of here without cutting off our noses to spite our faces. If we choose to give three month's notice, we have until the end of this month to make the decision and still finish in September. I am desperately in need of a holiday. We are both writing our resumes and shall call Jeddah Hospital this afternoon to find out about the chances of applying for the National Guard Hospital there. Janet has visited friends working ay that hospital a number of times since arriving here, and notes that the benefits and attitudes towards employees are far more generous and tolerable than our experiences here. We can lose nothing by trying. I know I cannot tolerate another year in Rehab no matter what happens.

So much for that idea. It seems we cannot apply for a position while we are within the country. We must apply through an agency. I, as a Canadian citizen, cannot apply from the UK unless British-Registered. So, for now, I will have to wait for holidays.

May 11, 1987
Mail is still coming through despite all tales I was told. I heard from my brother, David, and the draft I sent him arrived intact and in the nick of time, so he is now breathing a bit easier.

May 12, 1987
Work. Sleep. Work.

May 13, 1987
According to Kate, this Ramadan carries an altered tone to it. There are fewer Bedouins crowding the passages and walkways in the souq. The atmosphere is subdued. Religious overtones more severe, with chanting calls continuing long after the second round of evening prayers, occurring steadily between 2045-2115. The chanting continues long into the night, after the stores have reopened for shopping – from 2115 until after midnight. I have only been into Taif until 2330 and heard the continuous chanting up until I left. It becomes monotonous and hypnotic after a while.

I heard that a Russian ship was shot at, in the stretch of waterways off Kuwait. I know no details, except that it is considered an 'incident'. Kate attributes political tension as part of the reason there are the extra tensions in this year's Ramadan. That is part of the reason, plus the heavy

security that is always increased at this time of year, since the 1979 uprising of Shiites in Mecca. One of the patients on ILF is a quadriplegic as the result of a gunshot wound received during that uprising, hence is considered a VIP and a national hero. Being cloistered in Rehab for the rest of his life isn't much of a reward.

May 14, 1987
For the past two weeks the days begin with sun, but by afternoon the skies thicken and blacken with clouds giving way to heavy rains interspersed with thunder and lightning. In a superstitious country, it can't be a very positive omen for Ramadan.

May 15, 1987
Clouds are still winding in. Kate says this is an exceptional year for the rains, since they usually occur between November and March.

May 17, 1987
It feels like there is some phenomenal weather eruption waiting to occur. The electricity and water were off yesterday. The air conditioning is still broken down. The heavy mugginess makes it an effort to move. Even lying quietly works up a sweat.

May 18, 1987
I was in Janet's room today – talking with her before she went to work. I think she said something like '*You can sit on the bed if you want to, you know*'. So I did. And from there... what can I say? I am falling hard/soft into a most incredible relationship.

May 19, 1987
So it must rest. There are situations that fit continuing and others that must rest as moments in time.

May 21, 1987
Please ignore the previous entry.

May 25, 1987
Pam Harris resigned from her occupational therapy position, giving three month's notice. The resignation was, evidently, over an arthritic patient or a partial quadriplegic refusing to do any activities of daily living and insisting the staff do it all for them. The reaction of Administration was *'If you don't like it sister, you can always leave'*.

In August, Pam Harris will leave.

May 28, 1987
Eid began last night – the end to fasting. There was a Christmas-like atmosphere that invaded the place beginning with morning prayer. By 0700 the visitors began arriving with cakes and sweets on display. They arrived in their finery with new clothes and everyone exchanging gifts. This part of the holiday is to last for five days while virtually all the stores are closed for celebrations.

Janet's rather complicated Jeddah-based relationship has ended. I do not fully understand the situation.

June 1, 1987
The latest proposition from Al Hada is that all single females will be restricted to within a fifty-kilometre range of Taif. This rules out all travel. No official ruling is yet out though. I suspect it will come to nothing since it would likely cause a mass exodus of the western staff.

I was up to the dentist today, to fix a half tooth that had broken off. I saw Gassia. Her opinion of Al Hada is no greater than her opinion of Rehab. At Rehab, I have felt like a labourer in a work camp, so endless and wearing are the days and nights. It is only the strength of the bonding that grows between Janet and I that is keeping me going at the moment. I do not know where I will go or what will happen, once this spell in Saudi ends. This is such a strange place. I have an eerie sense of foreboding.

June 8, 1987
Awoke early this morning – about 0700. Janet awakened at the same time, and we met in the laundry room. We had not expected to see each other since it was 0300 before I got to sleep – and 0200 before she got to sleep (in our respective rooms). Over a depressed cup of coffee we decided that today was the day.

We caught the bus to Al Hada to speak with Gassia and wrote out our notices for ninety days – which will take us until September 5th. Then we handed them in. Our limits have been reached. I shall go to England with Janet and stay with her and her friend, until I sort out my own working and living permits.

June 10, 1987
A meeting with Zahrani today resulted in a very fair explanation of our reasons for going (exhaustion) and our essential assessment of the patients' problems at Rehab – i.e. they had nowhere to go, no motivation to progress, and a constant expectation of instant service from the staff. With his mildly wrinkled, weathered, smiling face, surrounded by checked ghutra, he is very much the smooth talking, diplomatic, astute administrator – seemingly innocent while asking loaded questions. (E.g. '*What do you think of the nursing administration? Is there a problem there?*')

It was a strange and difficult night at work. I kept myself going only by the business at hand on the ward. The temptation to run away from it forever was omnipresent.

June 11, 1987
It was much better night, so far as my head space went, although more hectic so far as stupidities went. I am off tonight.

June 17, 1987
During the past twenty days, I have worked 15 twelve-hour shifts. This is what they call regular time at Rehab.

June 19, 1987
I went down to the souq with Janet the other day and felt like my feet were never quite on the ground. It was the strangest sensation. There is an intensity and passion to our closeness that is almost like being drugged. This is the first time I have fallen so completely head over heels. After several years of celibacy I had never dreamed this kind of sharing could happen to me. So why do I still get feelings of foreboding?

June 22, 1987
The Rehabilitation Centre is built on the despair of the patients within. It is the underground reality of this place, subjugated in the daily interplay of complaints and problems that are invariably taken to the nursing supervisor on duty and from there to the administrator. One of the nursing supervisor's main duties is to run around from ward to ward soothing one complaint or another from an irate patient. The patients' complaints can range from a nurse not doing something as demanded or a nurse laughing at them or ignoring them. Everything from not getting a cigarette on demand, to wearing plastic gloves at the wrong time, to an unfortunate comment, can become the grounds for a problem that sets the wards on edge, with the patient immediately demanding to see the supervisor – or the director of nursing – or the administrator – or the interpreter. There is no satisfaction until the patient is placated and made to feel that he is right.

Kate seems to feed on this atmosphere. It is as if trying to placate the patient brings out her energy and happiness. She never seems brighter than when she is dealing with a sudden onslaught of personality conflicts, such as the one between the patient who demanded that a specific nurse clip his toenails, although the nurse didn't want to do it because the patient was getting too personal with her. (Meanwhile there were four other Filipino nurses who were willing to clip his toenails, but the patient didn't want them – only the nurse he specified.) It would be funny if it wasn't so pathetic, sad and continuous.

Staff are pushed to their limit, working a minimum of sixty hours a week. The nursing aides often put in seventy-two hours a week with their overtime. Patients' reactions and demands increase the short tempers and irritability. This place is a dead end for the patients. It is a virtual prison with no parole and no end to the sentence – no hope.

There were two suicide attempts in the past week. Ishamael Etudi tried to set fire to his bed. He is a C-7 quadriplegic with a bit of use in his arms and hands. He managed to set his pillow alight, but the fire went out. When he tried to set the rest of his bedding on fire, the staff managed to stop him. He ended up sliding himself out of the bed and onto the floor saying he wanted to die. He is 20 years old, and under penance to fast for the rest of his life because he cannot afford the blood money to pay off the family of the victim in the car accident for which he was responsible. His injuries resulted from the accident. He has now been transferred to Al Hada.

Another young quadriplegic on the Female ward, a 19-year-old woman, tried to knife herself the other night. Her relations told her to forget about them and that they do not intend to return. Her accident occurred two years ago, just after the formalities of having a marriage arranged for her. Before the marriage actually took place, both of her parents were killed in the traffic accident that crippled her. She was brought up with a more modern view of life than is usual in this country. She is now trapped on a ward where the other patients are horrified when she refuses to wear her veil and play the proper role of a Saudi woman. She too, is now in Al Hada, although expected to return here shortly.

Ingrid is spacing out to the point that a conversation can hardly be maintained because she doesn't seem to hear or comprehend what anyone says to her. Perhaps we are all acting strangely. Both at work and off work, it becomes more difficult to deal with problems because we are all worn out.

Again, there is an overwhelming atmosphere of working in a time bomb that may explode at any time or may tick away forever.

Dr. Grant will be leaving in September; so will most of the Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy staff. Janet and I will also be leaving at that time. There is talk of trying to recruit more Filipino staff and promoting some of the current CPNs to staff nurses. More Filipinos at Rehab are pregnant – Connie, Evan, Joy.

I work well with Evan. She's very intelligent; a registered nurse with a pretty, fine-boned, elfin, face. Her husband works in Jeddah. She lives on our floor at Rehab but tends to feel out of place with the westerners and is most often not seen. We have developed a definite respect for one another and work well together. When I asked her if it was difficult to be the only Filipino living on an otherwise western floor, she said she liked the privacy it gave her. Solitude is not something that most Filipinos appear to want. She is happy to be expecting a child – it will be her first – having already gone through the heartache of a miscarriage earlier this year. She and I often talk about the difficulties of living here, but with her husband also living in the country, she will continue to recontract so as to be near him. I think she will be able keep the child here, as her husband's situation will allow for some kind of family life in Jeddah. It is too bad that she can't get a position closer to him, but she says it is very difficult to get placement of choice from the Philippines.

Up at Al Hada, a Saudi Captain raped a male Filipino housekeeper – the young man was given the position after the Captain kept trying to rape female housekeepers. No one will punish the Saudi because he a Saudi Captain with the appropriate pips on his uniform, therefore his word will stand as truth and the Filipino will be ignored.

It becomes harder and harder to go into work. The souq still charms me though. My days off offer time to distance myself and wonder at the craziness of this place. I have discovered a few corners in the silver section of the souq (an area where some shops sell both old and new silver jewellery) where they sell old bits of Bedouin jewellery. I am fascinated by the pewter-like bells, the chains and the finger and toe rings. Large silver coins with a Queen Victoria imprint will have curious bits soldered onto them to be worn as pendants. Sometimes I see flat, ornamental, rectangular boxes, that were made to hold sayings from the Koran (now removed) – hung onto erratically beaded necklaces. It is like a naive art form – the silver bits are often bent or battered but always intriguing.

Jewellery is the Bedouin wealth and dowry that the women carry with them. As I hear it, the mother's jewellery is melted down and remade anew, as a dowry, when a daughter marries. It is a tradition that is dying quickly in this age of moving people into towns and cities. Gold begins to replace the traditional art forms. When the Bedouins need money on their Haj pilgrimages, the old silver bits are often sold to help pay for their journey.

Where will I go from here? That question still seems too far off. There are still two and a half months before our finishing date and that amount of time gives the sense of a mini lifetime ahead of us.

June 26, 1987
Someone has decreed that the cats are too prolific, and so a poisoning seems is taking place around Rehab. Instead of watching kittens cavorting around the doors of the residence, we watch them staggering, collapsing and dying. Today I saw exactly two cats in the whole place, when I used to see a dozen or more wandering about.

There was a black and white cat I called Charlie, after Charlie Chaplin, because of the small splotch of black fur under his nose that made the perfect moustache. I have not seen him for a while. I hope he is too wily to be caught by the poison.

June 30, 1987
I saw Charlie today. He is definitely a survivor. I have also seen a couple of other cats that managed to escape the scourge. At Rehab, Sylvia and Martina have rescued a litter of kittens and hidden them in one of the back rooms. So far, they are surviving and growing. The mother allows this protection when they are so tiny, but soon she will be taking them out into the world. Another group of survivors.



Back: Gassia, Kevin, Janet, Hazel
Front: Ingrid, Pam, Mavis

July 7, 1987
Teresa was standing by the security when I left for work last night. She smiled as I passed. I made some comment and smiled back but noticed that the smile did not catch her eyes. A car slowed down at the curb and she got into it. She is a truly beautiful girl – one of the few Filipinos here with Muslim background and married to a Saudi. As I understand it, about ninety to ninety-five per cent of the Philippine population are of Christian faith, and about five per cent of the population are Muslims. Being a Muslim is a bonus point when applying to work in this country.

Teresa has been married for five or six years. I gather it is not a happy marriage. Her large, dark eyes carry an almost haunted sadness. Her face rarely smiles. When I passed her last night, I assumed she was going out to a party of some kind. She had a beautifully embroidered headscarf wrapped around her hair, obscuring the lower part of her face. Beneath her abaya, I could see the gleaming, rich blue material of fancy attire. It was only later, when talking with Louella at work, that I came to realize that her husband offers her services to other men. He is her pimp. Perhaps he has other wives whom he holds in different esteem.

July 16, 1987
My departure date will be 5th September – three weeks before my full year is completed. I shall be docked three days of holiday pay; despite the fact I have put in more work time than anyone else on a one-year contract. By resigning early, we forfeit our return trip and will have to pay the fare ourselves. I would actually be better off financially if had I left for holidays and not bothered to return. No wonder so many play the game by the Saudi rules, of trying to get everything they can out a situation. No matter. I am the one who must live with my actions, and money I haven't got isn't worth counting.

A notice went around Rehab, sent out by Paddy, asking all the staff if they did or did not want to work extra hours at regular pay and if they were willing to, to please sign the form. (This is the question that Paddy told me months ago had already been agreed to by the Filipino staff.) Evan took me aside on the ward and asked if I would explain to the staff the meaning of this notice, since its wording had led to some confusion. She and I agreed that if everyone did not stand together on this issue, then nothing would ever change regarding the work rosters. Word must have leaked out to Paddy that the issue was being discussed and that everyone was being encouraged to make a stand. She quickly scrapped the form and figured out a retribution as only she can.

A memo was issued stating that there would be no requests for specific days off for any reason. There would be no swapping of shifts between staff. Only one day off would be given before going on leave instead of the three that had become customary. There would be no choice of where an individual would work on an overtime shift.

The roster for the next four weeks has come out. Westerners have all been short-changed, working, hence to be paid for only seventeen instead of the eighteen shifts, but all Filipinos have been given eighteen shifts with the opportunity for overtime in between. A sort of success.

It is very good to be leaving. Our tickets to London have been booked. Ironically, we ended up with round trip tickets since there is a special round trip fare of 1774 riyals, whereas the one-way fare is 2000 riyals. We will leave at 0130 on September 3rd, requesting three days off before we go. I doubt if Paddy will argue this since she sees us as the key troublemakers in persuading the Filipinos to stand up for their rights.

I finally got my parcel of gifts for Canada mailed. It cost 400 riyals to go by air courier. I almost didn't make into town though. When Janet and I walked out of Rehab housing with the package – a wrapped and addressed, two-foot square box – we were stopped at the security cubicle, and the attendant wanted me to open it up for examination. It had taken ages to collect enough paper and find the tape to put the box together, and there was no way in which I could reseal it if it had been opened. Brown wrapping paper is very difficult to find in this country.

After tempers being lost and words said and phone calls to the Al Hada security department, we were told once again that it had to be opened and examined – but it could be done in my room

so that I could repack it following examination. The security was alone at his post and so unable to leave. After a bit of humming and hawing, he took our names and employee numbers to report the fact that we had left with the package but let us go after making us swear to tell anyone who asked that it had been opened and checked. Whew.

I have also sent off most of the necessary forms needed to apply for nursing registration in Britain. That came to 1100 riyals for processing costs. So, between payments to Canada and England requesting and trying to get various documents copied and sent, I hope it all goes smoothly.

Ingrid is on holidays again and Kate leaves today. Tonight Janet and I will visit Gassia.



Janet and Pam at Gassia's 1987

July 18, 1987
Still no word from Dolores who went off three days ago for dental surgery in Jeddah. Janet and I now have our tickets for England. The visit with Gassia was the most relaxed day and evening that we have had for ages.

July 19, 1987
I walked into town today to go to *the shop by the mosque*. It was a typically bright, cloudless day. I headed through the back streets, past the anonymous, walled villas. A group of children, ranging in age between six and ten, were playing in an empty lot. As I passed them, I noticed they had stones in their hands and were throwing them casually into the street. Ingrid had mentioned that some children had thrown rocks at her the other day. I started to walk a bit faster, ignoring them, hoping they would ignore me.

Bits of stones hit my shoulder and my legs. I speeded up, attempting to keep my facial expression blank. To look afraid or upset would only evoke more laughter. When a large rock hit the back of my left leg, I stumbled. I continued walking. The children must have got bored. At any rate they did not follow me. The rest of walk into town found me fighting back tears. I could not face shopping and walked past the store, towards Building One, where I waited for the hospital bus that brought me back to Rehab. I managed to maintain my composure until back in my room.

I will not walk into town alone again. I will take the bus. I have a large bruise on my leg, about three inches in diameter, where the bigger rock struck me. Perhaps I'm lucky that it wasn't worse.

It is really my own arrogance that I have to blame, for thinking I could walk to and from town as I would be able to do in any western country. I am a western woman. I might wear an abaya, but my face and head are not covered. I walk alone. By the standards of this country, that makes me both a non-believer and prostitute. Those children threw stones at a symbol of something that they despised. It was not me, as an individual. They didn't know me. Children reflect the attitudes and words of their elders. No doubt they had heard comments about us. Perhaps our presence on the compound actually makes this area a less desirable place to live. I cannot be invisible in this country. I crave the anonymity of walking down a street in Canada – or anywhere – where I can melt into the crowds and just be. I need to get out of here.

July 20, 1987
Dolores is back. Sylvia goes on holiday on 30th July.

This country does strange things to people who are out here for any length of time. I do not know how anyone out here would have interacted with me had I met them in Canada. It is quite likely that, with our diversity of interests, we would never have developed the type of friendships that have carried us here. Will we continue to maintain contact once we have left? I don't know. I don't understand the changes I have experienced during my time here. How can I guess at the changes in anyone else? Whatever the case, I shall carry the friendships of Gassia, Pauline, Ingrid and Dolores with me. Whether or not we maintain contact, there will always be a welcome, should we meet again.

I will also carry Kate's friendship with me. I like the person I sense within her. Hers has not been an easy life. She has been here long enough to get drowned in the negative aspects of the place. It eats into the spirit and distorts one's perceptions. I hope she eventually reaches the

goals she has set herself and gets out of Saudi. I cannot speak neutrally of Paddy. I have an instinctive antipathy towards her that will not allow me to comment fairly.

Where will Janet and I end up? I cannot say but I can hope. I am both afraid and excited about the future – wherever it takes me – however it changes me. Janet and I are beginning our outward processing in terms of the multitudinous forms that will have to be signed.

Epilogue: My diary entries finish here.

Janet and processed out successfully and left for England on September 3, 1987.

On September 15th, I met up with Anne Rayvals in London at a B&B near Victoria Station. We explored a few corners of London, then, with a 1-week pass for the trains, we travelled north to Edinburgh, where we overnighted, then headed westward, onto to Isle of Skye, and then back down via Glasgow back to London, where I waved her off . Before and after, I stayed with Janet and her partner and friend, Jill, gradually meeting their extended family.

To become a settled resident in England, I would need birth certificates to prove I was descended from my grandmother, Kate Wannop (born in Scaleby Cumberland UK), so I booked a returned flight to Toronto, and then bussed by Greyhound to Vancouver and back, collecting my father's birth certificate in Winnipeg, and my parents marriage certificate in Vancouver, while visiting family enroute.

I left for Canada on November 18th, 1987, and sent a letter to England soon after my arrival in Canada to let them know all was well. When I returned to England three weeks later, Janet told me how thankful they were for the letter I wrote. Evidently, after I left for Gatwick airport, from King's Cross station, a fire started in the wooden escalators of King's Cross Station which spread quickly and killed over 30 people – some of whom were so badly burnt they couldn't be identified. Until my letter arrived, Janet and Jill were wondering if I might be one of the deceased.

My United Kingdom nursing registration came through on Oct 16th, 1987, which allowed me to apply for work in Saud Arabia. Janet and I signed a one-year contract for Al Hada Hospital and returned to Taif on January 6, 1988. We realized by then that we were a great friendship, but no longer a relationship. Janet was assigned to the Acute Medical ward, and I was assigned to the Kidney Unit at Al Hada Hospital, where I learned the ins and outs of kidney failure and peritoneal dialysis. Janet and I had a two-week trip to Cairo, Athens and Mykonos in June 1988.

Excerpt from a letter written to my mom:

> **June 25, 1988**
> Here I am again, back within the limitations of the compound and memories of Egypt, Athens, and Mykonos. After our three hectic days in Cairo, we arrived in Athens late in the evening. Unable to book a flight for that evening to Mykonos, we book for the next evening instead and took a bus into downtown Athens. The hotel we stayed at was only a ten-minute walk from the Acropolis, so we spent the next morning climbing through ruins and waking around the Parthenon. It was roped off, so we couldn't go inside but is an impressive series of structures overlooking the city of Athens.
>
> Mykonos is a small island, about a 40-minute flight away. The Mediterranean really is blue green. We spent time on the beaches and afternoons wandering the cobbled streets

(too narrow for cars) in the town. The streets mazed in and out, losing us many times, all lined with non-stop, white-washed houses, chapels, and shops – like a city in miniature. It was quite unbelievable, even as I attempt to describe it.

Janet took pictures and I shall get copies if the opportunity arises. It took a good week there before we finally relaxed and felt truly human again. Beer was cheaper than coffee and everywhere, little tables corner the streets with small outdoor cafes, which opened at erratic hours.

Coming back was almost a shock to the system and did take some readjustment. I was quite depressed for the first few days, but things are leveling off a bit now. I've been back at work for a week and am on nights tonight.

Excerpt from a letter written to my mom:

July 30, 1988
My mind tries to project ahead to what will occur at the end of this contract year, but I cant get a focus on things just yet. Whether or not I recontract elsewhere or try to find work in England are all suppositions right now. The main thing is to make it through this spell, and at times I wonder. But, like anywhere, one day pulls into the next and then the weeks slip by.



Nora, Tess, Pam, Mercy, June 1988

> There's still no extra staff on our ward (Nephrology) and as yet no likelihood of more staff. Two staff members are planning on ending their contracts in October. That will man only five people left on a ward rostered for twelve. It's not a very easy task to try and hold things together or keep the ward basically covered. I keep telling myself I don't want to do extra time, but somehow always seem to be doing it just to keep the place ticking over.
>
> What else for news? Not a lot, since outside of work, there is little time to do much more than keep up with the washing and cleaning up and occasional hours at the pool trying not to think of anything…
>
> This is a half-day – just before starting on night shifts, so am catching up on long overdue things like washing the towels, writing letters, etc. I haven't been able to do too much mailing since the holiday of Haj has sort of closed down most of the public offices for the last week to two. I can never quite make out just when these holiday times begin or end.

After the first few months back in the country, Saudi Charter Medical was at it again, telling the westerners that they were changing the pay schedule from bi-weekly to monthly payments. Westerners would get a raise at the same time (which in my case meant 5200 riyals per month instead of 5000. The Filipinos did not get the raise and were told that the difference in pay would only be 'a few riyals'. In truth, it meant they would loose a month's salary per years, as, being paid biweekly meant being paid for the equivalent to 13 months a year.

Once again, I found myself suggesting they simply forgo doing overtime because the hospital could not function without the overtime shifts they put in. In the end, the Filipinos not only stopped putting in overtime shifts, but also called in sick, which created enough of a crisis for the financial department to give them a pay adjustment that really was within a few riyals of what they were earning before. It was interesting to note that most of the westerners there believed the 'Saudi patter' (that the Filipinos were over-reacting), until someone sat them down to make them realize that those 'few riyals' meant a month's salary loss. It seems people mostly want to believe what they are told, so long as it does not affect them.

In October 1988, I became Head Nurse of the unit, after agreeing to stay on until October of 1989. I took over the position after the current (Filipino) Head Nurse received his green card to work in the US. Over the next year of work I compiled a manual on Peritoneal Dialysis and an Orientation Manual to the Kidney Unit in my spare time.

Excerpt from a letter written to my mom:

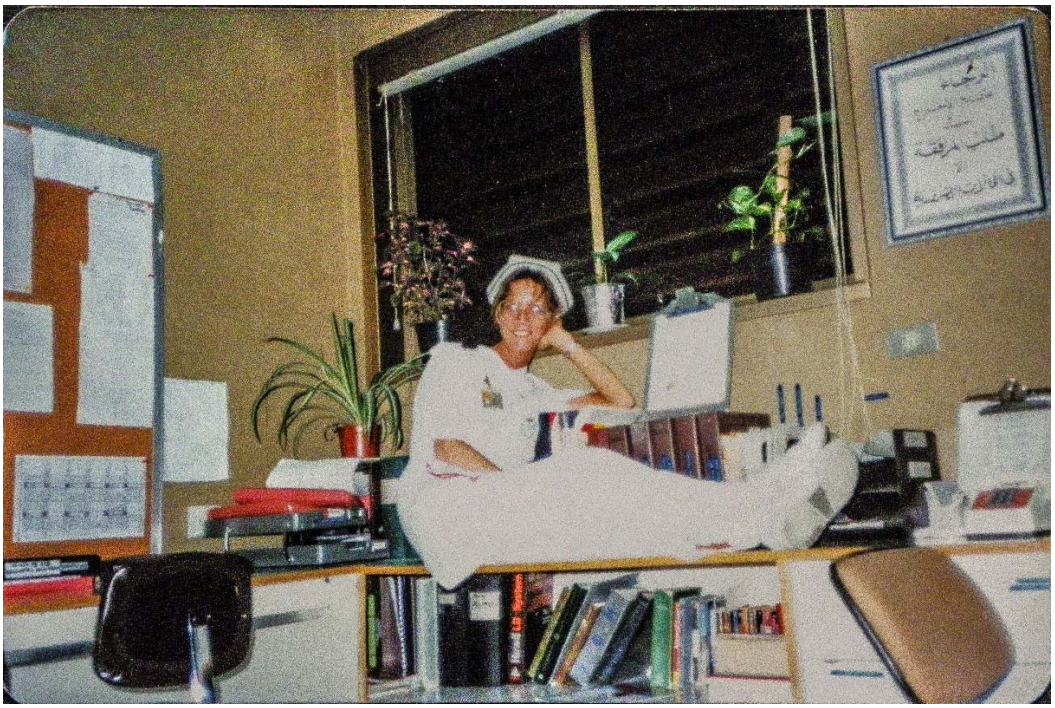
> **July 3, 1989**
> Work here is proving to be getting worse all the time. Staffing levels are now below the safety factor, so I've decided that by October, when my contract here ends, I'll head to England again. I have no real idea of what next, so will likely follow the winds and see what does or does not happen.
>
> Janet is pretty fed up as well and I suspect will leave not long after I do. She has holidays coming up and by July 19th will be away for a month– a well-earned break, I think. She's pretty shattered these days. We both are.

I've made it to Jeddah for a visit, and the escape from the hospital atmosphere was much needed and appreciated. I shall try again to get away to Jeddah by the end of July – Inshallah.

Whatever, it feels 'right' to be on a countdown to the next stage of things, whatever the next stage may turn out to be.

By the end of September 1989 I again processed out. Instead of a return trip to Canada, I requested a trip to Berlin by way of England; so I visited for a few days with Mavis, near Cambridge, (who kindly agreed to have a trunk of my belongings sent to her place until I found a permanent residence in England), before flying to Berlin, where I visited with my cousin Ian and his wife Elke a month before the Berlin wall came down.

From Berlin I bussed to Amsterdam for an overnight, then on to Manchester, where I stayed with Janet and Jill in Timperley, while my papers got processed to receive my settled-resident status in the UK. By January 1990, I moved into 64 Afghan Street in Oldham, on the north side of Manchester – a small two-up, two-down home in row housing that I purchased, thanks to the money saved from working in Saudi.



1989

[Postscript: My nursing diploma was never returned to me. Whenever I went to Al Hada to ask for it, the right person wasn't there until no one seemed to know anything about it, so eventually I gave up.]