

## Water = Life - so they say!



It was day 8 of no water and about 35oC, I was out all day and all I was looking forward to was coming home and having a shower. How can I shower with no water I hear you ask - well I recently had a tap put onto the tank so I can turn the tank water off and save it for such a time as this. I knew I had a half full tank and I knew I could come home and have a shower albeit a trickle of water over my body.

So I arrive home, I greet Flora and her Nanny and suggest I am off to shower. I get myself all sorted for a shower, only to find there is NO water - I call out - Lea can you turn the tank on please? I hear a muffled call back - "it's on!" What??? No it's not there is no water coming out. So I get dressed - not a drop of water on my hot and sweaty body. I had just returned from bible study where we had to choose a fruit of the spirit as our fruit for the year - God has a sense of humour because I chose - wait for it - Patience!! Why - you tell me!

While constantly reminding myself about my key word for the year as 'Patience' I go out to the tap where we have to turn the tank water on and off only to find a local standing there filling her gerry can with a very slow trickle of water. I turned the tap - no water - I turned it back again - the trickle has stopped - no water - we have NO water! And this is day 8 of NO water! The previous 7 days we had tank water but now we have NO tank water and NO town water!

"Lea why was there someone filling up their gerry can at my tap?" To which Lea replies, "Oh they have been coming all day - I have counted at least six gerry cans!" Lea that is NOT town water - it is TANK water - OUR water - to bath the baby - to flush the toilet - to wash the clothes - to wash the dishes - OUR water! Now we have nothing - not a drop! Now don't get me wrong - as I said to Lea I am the first to be generous - but not when it is inconsiderate to our own needs. I swiftly sent Lea down to the local well to fill up a gerry can so I could at least give Flora a bath!

Now it's 7pm and Lea has gone, I nearly 'popped a puffer valve' lifting the gerry can onto the table to fill the baby bath. I told Flora it will be a shallow old bath tonight, and as I was saying that - a gecko poo fell into her bath from the gerry can! Did I tell you 'Patience' was the word I chose for my year? I very calmly scooped that gecko poo out of her bath and told her - my girl - the water is still wet - this is all we have - you have to deal with it! (I still haven't had my shower that I was busting to come home and have yet!) There was a time when I would have tipped the whole water out and started again but after 8 days of NO water we had to make do with what we had.

By day 10, now with NO tank water either I was a little bit over this NO water thing. I had friends on the other side of town that had a 'NO Power' issue and I was willing to swap, but I am sure whatever you are going with out, the grass always looks greener so to speak. So let me just recap the ramifications of NO water, that means NO flushing the toilet! NO having a shower! NO washing the dishes = risk of rodents and bugs! NO washing the clothes! NO washing the floors! All when it is about 30oC. So as I started saying by day 10 I was a little over it - but I was practising my 'Patience' and so I asked my taxi driver Charles to help me buy another gerry can. Aaaah yes the old gerry can - so you drive up to the markets where they sell gerry cans and all these african men bend down to look into the car window and see a Mzungu - means there is a sale about to happen. They are all and I mean at least 15 men crowding the car shoving their gerry cans into the windows. Charles tells me they were originally asking for 3,000rwf (\$4:90AUD) and he told them they saw the Mzungu and he wouldn't pay more than 1500rwf (\$2:45). Then the strangest thing happened that I had never thought of before - ALL these days in Africa as I watch people walking to and from the well with their gerry cans, Charles starts to smell every gerry can - he shakes his big long African finger and sends them back and then the seller runs over to the pile of gerry cans and searches for another one - he too is smelling them and then shoves them back into Charles window and asking him to smell them! I noticed on some of them that they had the hazardous stickers on the side of them and I was saying I didn't want a gerry can with anything hazardous in them because of the baby! So what do they do - they stand there in front of the car window and peel the stickers off and then push it back

in your face trying to re sell it to you again! All the while I am sitting in the passengers seat thinking - I bet these guys are just happy to have a drop of water in their gerry cans let alone not having a shower at all! Oh I am so precious and such a princess getting all frustrated because there is NO water! I am living in Africa after all!

Now Charles and I communicate through broken English and broken Kinyarwanda and generally we do pretty well getting the message across but today we just couldn't sort out the gerry can thing until we got home and asked Lea to interpret for us! The gerry cans had all in fact had diesel or some other car something or other in them - so when Charles did get it out of the boot of the car it did in fact stink! He told me to clean it with boiling water - Um Charles remember we don't have any water!!! That's why I needed to buy a gerry can to collect water! So I rinsed it with vinegar and water and shook that puppy as hard and as long as I could - thinking this has done the trick - to no avail!

I just could not bring myself to allow Flora to have a bath using that water - so I told Lea that gerry can is only for flushing the toilet and mopping outside the house - not inside! This week after 14 days of NO water, I filled that gerry can with bleach and shook it as hard and as long as I could - and it still stinks!

What is worse is when you have to lift that gerry can, you bend from the knees so you don't put your back out and heave that thing up to flush the toilet. Because the nozzle is a small opening the water drips out and splashes into the toilet and it in turns splashes onto your face - all the while you are breathing in the fumes of the diesel / bleach (not to mention other fumes) from the inside of the gerry can! Oh and lets talk about the inside of the gerry can - anything of Flora's you can't find, like her lego blocks - just have a look down the nozzle of the second gerry can that does not own a lid - thats exactly where you will find her mega duplo blocks!!! I quickly learnt that you fill up the bucket from the stinky gerry can and then you tip the bucket down the toilet - every day you learn something new huh!

It wasn't long before we sent the guy next door to go to the well and fill our gerry cans - he charged us mind you 100rwf to go and 30rwf to collect the water x 2 gerry cans - so now I am paying the neighbour who filled THEIR gerry can from MY tank water to collect water for ME from the TOWN well! Ok you can stop laughing now! Anyway I started the hand washing didn't I, we haven't washed by hand since June when someone blessed us with a washing machine. So I wash by hand and ingeniously I put the hand washed clothes in the washing machine for a spin cycle - so this is a front loader and once you close that door - there is no opening it for love or money! Being the fancy machine it is - it doesn't have just a spin cycle does it - it has a rinse AND spin cycle - so the wet clothes are in the machine, the door is locked, there is NO water and all the machine does is bleep bells and whistles at me - I can't open the door - I can't stop what I asked it to do - Flora is spinning the dial around because that makes the lights light up and it beeps too! NO water goes beyond all borders of sanity and patience I can tell you - and TODAY is Australia Day - send me home and take me to the beach I beg of you!

Day 14 and Flora and I stay one night in a hotel (not because we didn't have water but rather to maintain frequent flyer points = first world problem I know) and all I wish is that

they have water - and yes they did - Flora had a long hot bath for over an hour which for her was like her very own swimming pool because we don't have a bath as such! We came home the next day and the water was on - quick before you do another thing you run and turn the tank tap on so that puppy can swiftly fill up. So then when the water was gone again on Monday - this time we at least had tank water - and my 'Patience' is tried and tested!

Let me tell you, there is nothing like a clean kitchen, there is nothing like standing under a running shower, there is nothing like washing your hair, there is nothing like providing a basic need for your baby, there is nothing like flushing a toilet, there is nothing like hand washing in a bucket of water or better still placing it in the washing machine and there is nothing like mopping your floors!

So next time you turn on a tap - think of us here in Rwanda some days with water and some days without - and then when you turn on a light or heat something up in the microwave - think of us here in Rwanda some days with power and some days without - but EVERY day we are learning 'Patience' because that is our word for the year!

Bless you for blessing us - just by reading to the very end!

Much love,

Michele (who has had a shower) and Flora xoxo