

11. EGYPT

(28 April to 15 May 2011)

11.1. A Tiny Piece of the Puzzle (Linda; Egypt; May 2011)

Egyptian history is larger than life. There is an old kingdom, a middle kingdom and a new kingdom. There are 21 dynasties! There are hundreds of pharaohs. They date back to 3100 BC! Pagan Gods and Goddesses are freaky, funny and frightening. Christianity, under its own curious 'Coptic' brand, takes root in 45 AD! And, boy, foreign invaders are frequent, fast and furious! Libyans, Persians, Greeks, Romans and then the Arabs with Islam! And the Turks, the French, the British.

So, surprise! There is antiquity lying around all over the place! But if only, a single piece of antiquity could be attributed to a single pharaoh and a single period of time. No such luck! A pharaoh designs and builds a tomb, decides to be buried in a shrine elsewhere, is then found in an antechamber raided by deceitful offspring, which is eventually re-modeled by a whole string of pharaohs in upcoming dynasties. And a temple dripping with pagan Gods and Goddesses is first converted for Christian and then for Islamic purposes. Yes, tick-tock, tick-tock, one confusing layer follows another confusing layer.

The scale is too vast. The effect is too tremendous. My own dumbness and littleness is too crushing!

So, imagine how chuffed I am when a tiny piece of this 'colossal' puzzle falls into place.

Allow me ...



In the photo above, I stand between an Egyptian and a Nubian at the ferry terminal in Wadi Halfa. We stand, just as Egyptians and Nubians have always stood, somewhere between Khartoum and Aswan, along that section of the Nile made less navigable by those 6 sets of cataracts (rapids).

I read that power shifts relentlessly along this stretch of the Nile between Nubians (north Sudan) and Egyptians (south Egypt). And boy, how that power pendulum swings; first Nubians handle all resources from central Africa to Egypt; then Egyptians have a colonial presence in Nubia; then Egyptians are forced to travel overland as Nubians take control between Khartoum and Aswan; and then, wait for it, Nubians actually conquer the whole of Egypt in 730 BC and rule for 60 years (known as the Kush period); when Syrians invade Egypt, the Nubians retreat a little further south (i.e. Meroe). Will this power pendulum swing again?

I admit, without shame, I have a strong bias towards Nubians. Simply because they are an indigenous African people responsible for defining examples of powerful African civilization, in Punt (2450 BC) and Meroe (600 BC), and prove the Afrocentric view that development of civilization and the formation of state in Africa is home-grown and not externally inspired by Arabs, or Europeans.

So I complete a tiny piece of the puzzle and it delights me. And it all comes to light in this haunting love story between the Egyptian Ramses II and his Nubian lover, Nefertari.

Ramses II, is a powerful Egyptian Pharaoh who rules from 1279 to 1213 BC. He is responsible

for, amongst others, the huge chunky antiquity at ABU SIMBEL and the KARNAK. He has 5 wives, 4 are Egyptian and one is Nubian. Nefereti, the Nubian, is by far his favourite!

He builds two great Temples at ABU SIMBEL to ensure their lives, and their love, continue for eternity. The Great Temple of Abu Simbel and the Temple of Hathor! The first has Ramses sitting with 3 gods, all at an impressive height of 29m.

The second, the Temple of Hathor celebrates Ramses and Nefereti with 6 statues 10m high. In one, Nefereti actually wears the costume of the Sun Goddess, Hathor! She is also the same height as Ramses. This is unheard of, as wives in other pieces of antiquity, only made it up to the knees of their mighty men.

The insides of both temples burst with boastfulness! Wall-to-wall paintings show Ramses shooting arrows from his chariot, trampling over his enemies and slaughtering them in front of the Gods. And Nefereti stands right beside Ramses and appears before the many Gods at equal height.

Doesn't her prowess, in love, put a smile on your face!

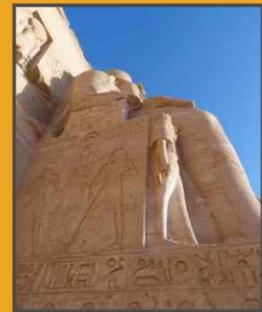
Thank you, Nefereti, for this weighty piece of the puzzle.



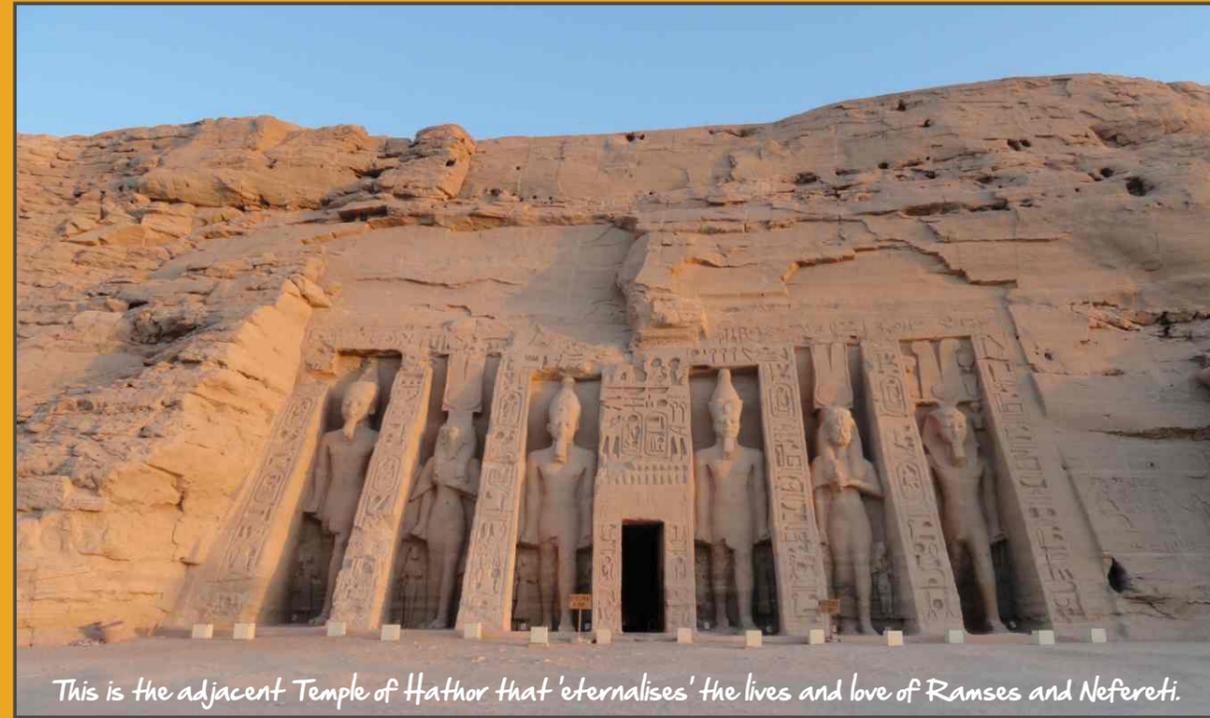
The Great Temple of Abu Simbel, on the Nile between Wadi Halfa and Aswan, is in the background.



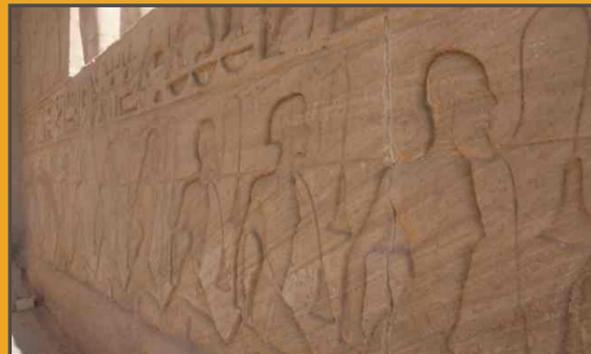
The Temple of Abu Simbel celebrates Ramses II. Here he is depicted with 3 gods (one toppled over sometime during the last 3000 years).



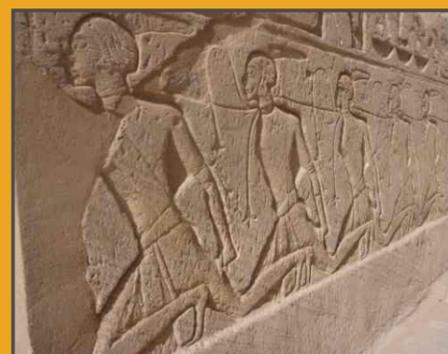
These guys are huge! These statues are 29 m high!



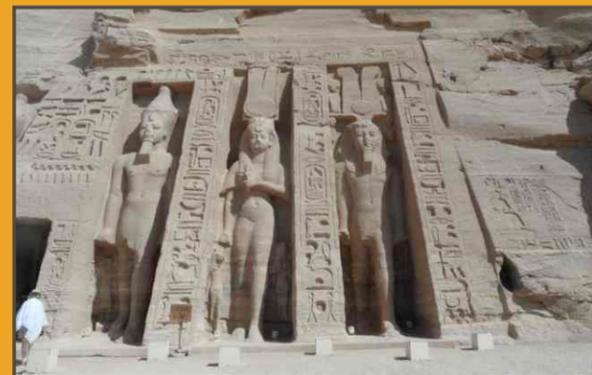
This is the adjacent Temple of Hathor that 'eternalises' the lives and love of Ramses and Nefereti.



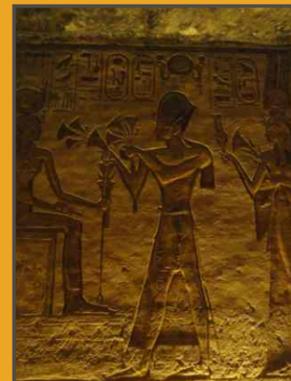
The entrance to the Temple is flanked by a wall of Egyptians on the one side...



... and Nubians on the other side!!!



Here Nefereti wears the costume of the Sun Goddess Hathor and is the same height as Ramses.



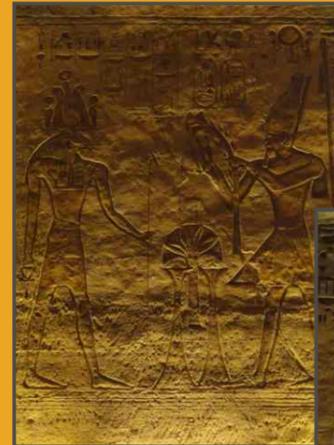
Nefereti adorned ...



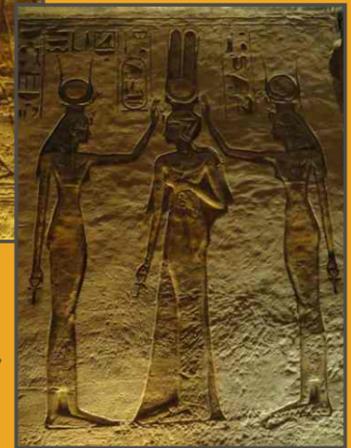
Ramses slays his enemies in front of the Gods ...



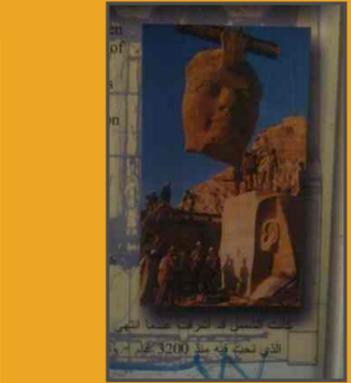
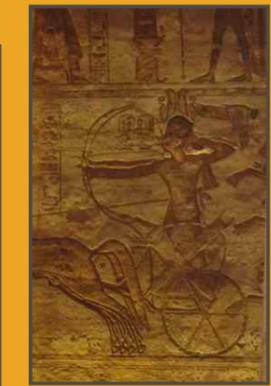
Ramses II shooting arrows at his fleeing enemies.



Here Nefereti is again depicted as the Sun Goddess, Hathor.



Here Nefereti is the same height as the Gods.



Lake Nasser is built in the 1960s. This photo captures the dramatic step of relocating Abu Simbel. 50,000 Nubians also lose their homes.

11.2. Some Photos from Egypt - The South



Egypt starts for us in Aswan. This is a huge Coptic Cathedral along the Nile.



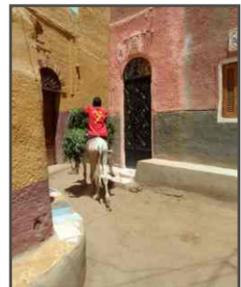
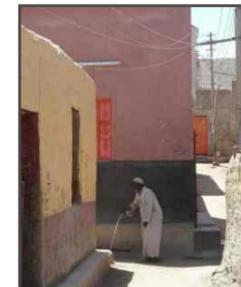
We have an Egyptian flag and a few other African badges stitched to our saddle bags at a market in Aswan.



Also at the market are eating pigeons for sale. I try it at a restaurant and must admit it's not worth the trouble.



The promise of 'no hazzle, no haggle' at each and every stall is never kept. We learn to play the game.



We visit the two Nubian villages of Sion and Kofi on the Elephantine Island on the Nile and take these photos.



We see quite a few of these old Russian Jawa bikes.



Each mannequin displays a subtle decorative difference.



On the streets we see ...



Old and new ...



These are taken at the 'Sound & Light Show' of the Temple of Philae on the Aglikia Island just south of Aswan.



Sound & Light Show.



Young and old ...



Felluccas of the Nile.



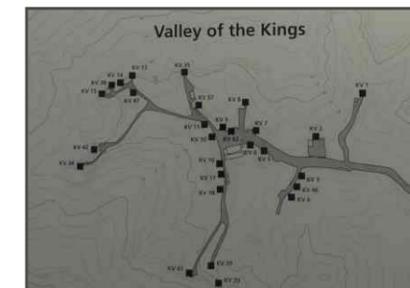
... and we go for a sunset cruise on the Nile Flower.



The Nile in Egypt is broader and more fertile than in the Sudan.



In Luxor we visit the Valley of the Kings, the resting place of many of the Pharaohs.



This map shows the burial tombs of the Pharaohs. There are many and work continues identifying new and restoring old.'

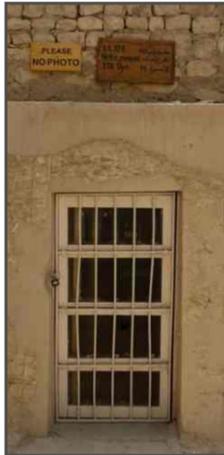




Here you see the hundreds of tombs still being explored - most not of Kings (i.e. pharaohs) but of wealthy citizens (i.e. nobles).



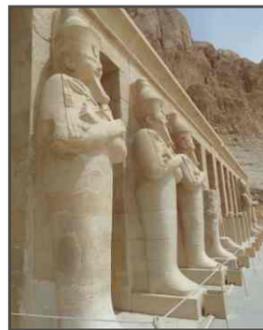
The homes of modern-day 'commoners' have and are being cleared to expose new ancient tombs.



Valley of the Nobles - the less grand tombs of wealthy merchants also have beautiful wall paintings depicting the owners life.



Near Luxor we also visit the Temple of Hatshepsut. She is Egypt's most beloved queen from the period around 1450 BC!!!!



!! It's Impressive !!



!! It's HOT!!



The Karnak, on the east bank of Luxor, is a complex of many sanctuaries, pylons and obelisks. It was built by Ramses II from the period 1250 BC.



We 'goats' look each other in the eye. One from 1250 BC and the other from 1966 AD.



We see a lot of graffiti emanating from the recent revolution.



This song and dance isn't related to the revolution but we feel a general exuberance.



... and get the definite impression that Egyptians are proud of their stand against Mubarak.



I swear these guys are on one motorbike. We manage to 'snap' them as they cheerfully zoom past.



Information is power. Satellites, internet, twitter and cellphones are everywhere.

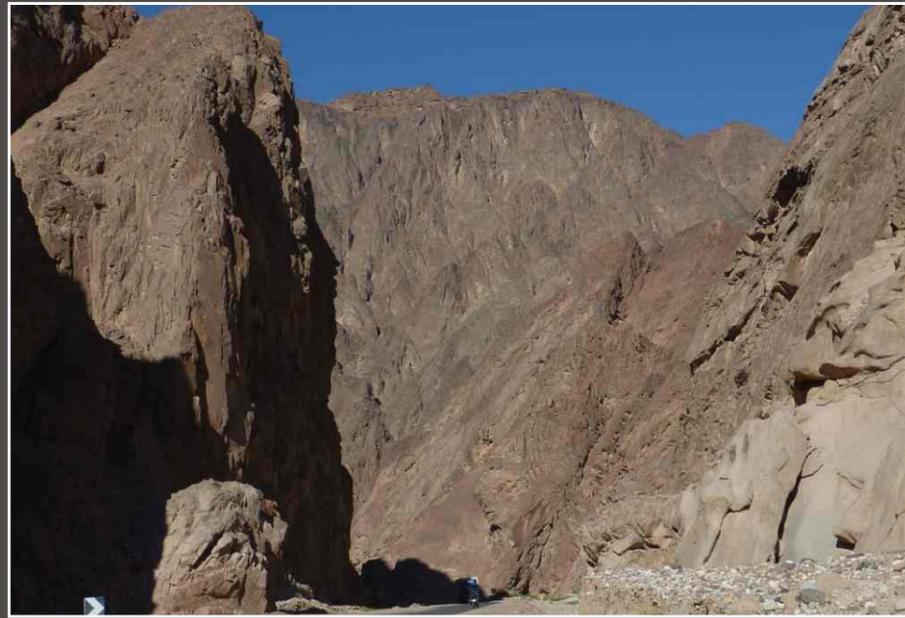
11.3. Some Photos from Egypt - The North



The Sinai is flanked by the Red Sea in the west and the Gulf of Aqaba in the east. It's desert ...



... and spectacular land forms ...



Look at the scale of it ... Harry is that speck in the distance ...



Here and there we see the remnants of an old bedouin settlement and palm grove ...



... and a still inhabited home.



A 'little' conversation with a Bedouin boy.



We unsettle the motorbiking 'status quo' in this tiny village in the Sinai.



Another speck in the distance ... not sure if this speck is Harry or me.



We have a long ride to St Anthony's Monastery on the west side of the Red Sea.



Our first glimpse (on the right) takes the breath away. In the middle of nowhere!



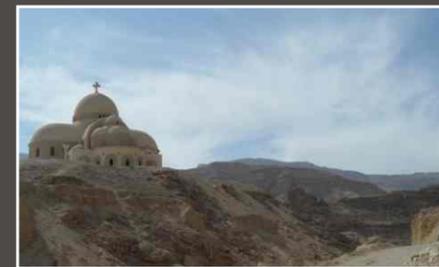
Here it is from the outside.



Anthony, an early Christian hermit born in 250 AD, spent 40 years here in a cave. At first his followers stay in makeshift dwellings.



His followers grow rapidly and today it functions as a Coptic Monastery for Monks.



And another Coptic Church peeps out over the hills.



We also go to St Katherine's Monastery in the heart of the Sinai Mountains.

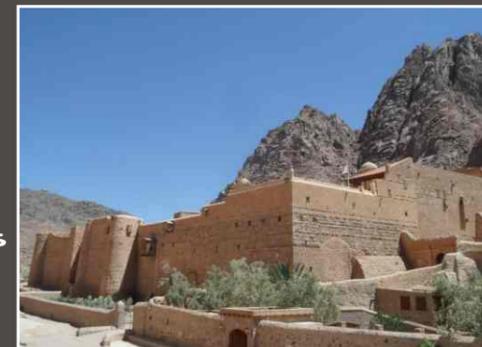


Mount Sinai is in the background. It is believed that this is where Moses received the 10 Commandments.



We are joined by some Bedouin boys on camels for the last stretch to St Katherine's Monastery.

This Monastery from 350 AD was built by Empress Helena for local hermits. Believed to be near the burning bush where God spoke to Moses.





And with the Red Sea looking like this ...



We find an endless strip of hotels like this ...



... and this ... but all eerily empty of tourists because of the revolution.

And with the Gulf of Aqaba looking like this ...



We find endless beach resorts, hotels and restaurants ...like this ...



... and this ... but also relatively empty of tourists.



Drinks always come with 'lupin', 'chick-pea' and 'popcorn' snacks.



... and the day's snorkeling was fantastic too!



Both the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba have a number of oil fields.



... and wind farms ...



We overnight at Suez and see ships line up to squeeze through the canal.



Our last spot in Egypt is Alexandria on the Mediterranean Sea. This is the view from our hotel balcony ... during the day.



... and during the night.



We love Alexandria. Old world charm is bursting through a few decades of grubbiness.



I need a hairdresser and find this charming gentleman in this beautiful art deco salon.



And I leave with a head of bouncing curls!



There are coffee shops all over the place ...



Producing sights like this ...



... and this!

Have to end off with a few shots of markets in Alex ...



EGYPT

11.4. Dread! and Delirium! (Linda; Egypt; May 2011)

Harry & I arrive in Alexandria, our last city in Africa. It takes us 9,5 hours to get there from Port Suez. It's a frantic 300km maze of tarred road; jam-packed with earsplitting beeps and screeches.

Harry finds us, like he has every night since we left South Africa, the most perfect accommodation. It's cheap, it has character and it has a view.

We 'sleep like dead oxen' (i.e. 'slaap soos dooie osse'). But I wake choking with *Dread and Delirium!!*

I'm sorry to spill with 'drama' but I'm full to the brim with it! I've run from 'drama' all my life, but here I am letting it sit on my lap!

Little d words haunt me. They chase me up walls and down again. I feel distraught, deflated, dispossessed of a dream, a dread. But I also feel divine, a dance, a delight, delirium.

Dread! My 'it' is all over! The 'it' that has kept ALL of me, unwaveringly happy, in one direction, for 6 months. I'm headless without my true north!

Delirium! My 'it' is true! The 'it' that I so desperately wanted to find, I find is true. I am elated! This continent of ours is a real, riveting, genuine place without trivia, frills and trappings, embellishments and gimmicks. Its people are open, honest, frank and kind without pretensions, clutter and 'issues'. And I know this is simply 'my truth' and that others will find what they want to find. But this awareness does not dilute my personal euphoria.

I am reminded of Paulo Coelho's beautiful book, 'The Alchemist'. He sets out four steps to pursue your life's journey, your aspiration. The first is to simply identify your dream. This is tough and people die without knowing this uncertain pleasure. The second is to overcome the desire of loved ones to stop the pursuit of your dream. The third is doubt about your own abilities. The fourth is that empty feeling that invades you as you are about to complete your journey. And the crazy notion that grabs you and makes you want to abort your mission, sabotage your journey to keep your aspiration alive!

Pitter, patter, pitter, patter, I follow these 4 steps exactly!

The first step, naming my aspiration, is clear after a first motorbike trip to Mozambique. I'm terrified we don't get to do another Mozambique. I'm absolutely bloody certain my journey is on my motorbike and on my continent. I get off lightly with the second step, as my Harry and I share this aspiration. But my 'mamma' Gail is deeply, awfully worried and doesn't utter a discouraging word. Oh, the third step haunts me, a thousand times, in a thousand places. But most often in the 'forward bend' position at yoga! I glance at my wrists and ankles, neatly stacked up next to each other. I shudder that my life's aspiration depends on these four exposed, bony, fleshless, pivotal but pathetically weak links! How will I move forward without even one of them? I cannot engage the clutch, change the gears, twist the throttle or squeeze the brakes. How will I put on my boots, my gloves, my helmet!

And PLONK, here we are. We place a last step in Alexandria. No! Stop! Go back! What do I do to undo this dream! Quick! Be calm. Think. Harry says we'll plan other trips ... the Silk Road, South America. Yes? That's wonderful, but it doesn't feel the same! Why? Why! Ah, it is because I don't have an emotional investment in these places. Harry says, let's do the west coast of Africa then. Yes! Yes! Yes! There is beautiful. There is a real solution!

And just sowe sabotage our dream by simply doubling its length. Will we really get to totter in the steps of Paulo Coelho again? Oh, I will hope so!

And slowly light-weight delirium replaces the dead-weight dread.

Our trip is Africa, not Europe. We zip through Europe easily. We have no need to digest anything except tasty bits and sips in Italy, Austria, Germany, Holland, France and England. We only stop properly to slurp up friends and family! And gosh, with each and every hug-without-end, I feel a little more dread drip out!

Thank you and you and you and you!

Achim and Tanja, our absolutely out-of-the-ordinary friends, and all their friends, in Frankenberg, Germany.

Michiel, Petra, Alexander, Maro and Philip, our warm and wild family in Kleve, Germany. Huibert, Julien, Onno, Siem and Hedy, our cool and crazy family in Amsterdam, Holland. And our Stella, Nicholas, Lucy and Matthew, a sister and a husband, a chocolate monster and a pasta face, who meet us in Calais, France for the last stretch to the UK.

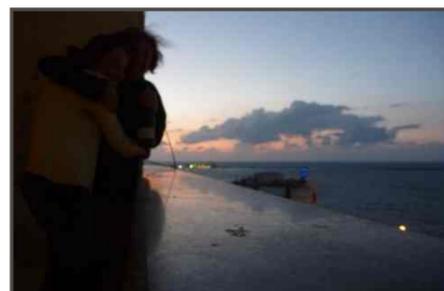
Yes, most of all, thank YOU, dear Harry. I am so Happy-go-lucky-go Harry.



In the lift of the hotel in our last city in Africa, Alexandria.



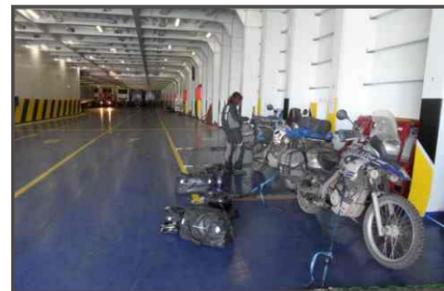
From our balcony, overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, Harry prepares to open a bottle of champagne ...



A few days later we are ready to board the ferry and cross the Mediterranean to Venice, Italy.



In Venice with 3 fellow travellers - Spanish Joan also on a motorbike and UK couple Will and Kim, the caretakers of an empty overland Dragoman truck.



A very empty ferry because of the Egyptian revolution. We are 2 of about 15 passengers.



... and again ...



And it's not long before we are party-ing with our friends in Frankenberg, Germany.



That's Harry in the far left corner of the ferry lounge. We find out later that this ferry service is discontinued 2 weeks later.



... and again ...



That's Achim on your right.



Ai, that's the sun setting on our wonderful, wonderful, wonderful trip through Africa.



... and again ...



... and the 'Absolutely Fabulous' funny 'Tanya' is on your left ...



... and it runs in the family ...
this is her brother!



And a little further north in Germany,
Kleve, a good rowdy celebration with my uncle
Michiel & Petra and Maro & Philip and friends.



Harry with Michiel.



And here in Amsterdam we chat
late into the night with my dear cousins,
Julien and Siem, and Hedy and Onno!



And my sister Stella and her family
join us from London for some wet
camping in Calais, France.



Harry with Matthew.



Me with Stel's
2 men, Nicholas
& Matthew.



Our Lucy is going places ...



Oh, what fun!



And just for the record
my Harry on a good hair day!



12. EUROPE

(15 May to 12 June 2011)

12.1. Turning Maslow Upside Down (Linda; Europe; June 2011)



This is our last posting. We didn't expect to enjoy this website so much! A big thank you, to Michnus and Elsebie and Luis, for suggesting it and making it happen!

It's quite a bit of work but also a surprising treat. Everyday, for 6 months and every kilometer for 25,000km, we feel its persistent little pressure. The desire, and promise, to document, in a way, that makes sense to others. It's a little but important step from the scribbled notes, the half-finished lists and incomplete thoughts. But the joyfulness we feel in sharing. The richness our experience gains in its writing and showing. The gratefulness we feel in other's interest. The fuzzy, warm feelings we get with responses. We are going to print it all out, ramblings, photos, comments and all, as soon as we get home. It'll make a fine collection for our coffee-table. We will page through it for a long time to come. Thank you for making exactly this possible. Sincerely, thank you.

And please, indulge us one more time ...