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I can see the Nile from my windows.

The roof is always crawling with geckos. These woven mats shield me from their droppings.

I catch up on email at night. I have a gadget that allows me to get Internet access from my cell phone.



Living A Dream

Few Americans would want to call a hut in Uganda home. And then there's me, who thinks it's pretty close to perfect.

BY JESSIE STONE, M.D.

Most people in rural Uganda live in a hut, only they call it a "banda." It may not look like much, but to me it's the Ritz-Carlton. If you had seen my previous banda you'd understand. That one was so tiny I could barely stand up in it. It didn't even have a proper door.

Now I actually have room for a desk, which is important since my banda is also the office of "Dr. Jessie"—that's what my patients call me. I've been practicing medicine here since 2004 and in 2006 I helped establish the

Soft Power Health Clinic. I spend about five or six months of the year in Uganda and the rest racing with the U.S. Women's Freestyle Kayak Team.

It didn't take too long to adjust to living here, but it was tough at times. I didn't have electricity in my banda until three years ago so I'd have to wear a headlamp to read at night. I don't have a shower—I walk outside and up a flight of stairs to use a public one. And while I love the food, there's no chocolate here! I miss it sometimes.

None of this feels like a sacrifice, though. I'm not Mother Teresa; I really enjoy being here. Uganda turned out to be the answer to a career crisis following med school. Did I want to practice medicine? Kayaking is my passion, so wouldn't I be happier as a professional athlete? Well, I found a way to fulfill both dreams. When I'm not seeing patients, I'm kayaking on the Nile, just a few hundred yards away from my banda. In Uganda, my life is wonderfully balanced.

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