

Joy's Diary

Inbound.



"Will passenger Joy Packard, for BA Flight 077 to Luanda, please make her way to Gate 28 immediately."

F***. What time is it? Dana had told me to avoid displays of conspicuous wealth so I've left my watch at home. The clock on my mobile says 6.20.

BA only flies to Luanda once a week. So does Air France. If I miss this I won't make the start of Dance for Peace. Oh dear... Gate 28 is miles away. I start running. And tallying: two visas (£40 each); one Yellow Fever Certificate (£45); jabs for Typhoid, Hepatitis A & B, Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Polio (free but painful); and Malaria prophylaxis (free but constipating). Not to mention the months of preparation, emotional wear and tear, and a pre-paid child care bill that would cancel the Third World Debt. All to no avail if I don't get on this flight. Explain that one to Dana. If I miss it, I'm a dead woman.

Heathrow is the worst airport. Miles of corridors and walkways criss cross each other apparently at random. I pass the board that tells me, helpfully, it's a 15-minute walk to Gates 25 -28. It's 15 minutes to take off. I have a pully suitcase, a long woolly cardy, a bag of duty free and a magazine in my hands. I'm 53 and one day I will be one of those women who travel through airports looking soigné: one bag, sun gasses, no coat and a bucket load of sang froid. Just not today.

I get to Gate 28 and instead of being reprimanded everyone's really nice to me. A nice young male attendant helps me with my cabin baggage and another moves me - even before I sit down - to a row of three seats all to myself. I'm as far back in economy as I can get without hanging off the tail fin. Another asks me if I'd like a glass of water. This is all very pleasant, all very British Airways. The click of my seatbelt seems to initiate take-off. It's not until the drinks trolley comes round that I get a chance to look at my fellow passengers. They all look the same. Middle aged, male, wearing well - worn and washed shirts with chinos. Close-

cropped hair. And wearing an air of being at one with their surroundings. Like they're in the dinner queue at the staff canteen. And they all sound Scottish. Booze flies off the trolleys before and during dinner. Apparently, they're on their way back to the rigs.

I had had the most lovely email from Dana outlining what I might expect at Luanda airport. It's exactly as she describes. I apply anti-mosquito stuff in preparation for the welcoming party in the humid foyer. It brings the colour off my passport onto my hands – I wonder what it's doing to my skin.

I love this part of a journey. Setting foot into a new culture, protected by the process of immigration, not yet out of my own culture but beginning to see the new one. What do they do? What's important? How friendly are the people, how unfriendly the procedure? (At the moment America comes out top on both counts.) The man checks my vaccination card and I stand in the queue for foreign nationals.

In the airport, the men from economy are corralled in the corner; they must be waiting to be transferred off to this rig I keep hearing about. Standing alone but together, their knees hyper-extended, hands in pockets, backpacks at their feet. Heavily laden but travelling light. They chat in that lads kind of way. Slightly too much physical space between them for it to be a real conversation.

What's their life like? Who've they left behind? What do they do in their spare time – learn Portuguese? Do they see anything of Luanda before they go back 28 days later? How do they interact with Angolans? I don't seem to be able to find my curiosity switch to turn it off.

I notice there's a long line in the section called Diplomats. Purely based on appearances, I'm the happiest person in the concourse. I'm excited about being here. Before I came I imagined that I would see Angolans in colourful traditional or western dress, families arriving. But it's not like that. It's the Riggers, the Diplomats and me. I don't think I've ever seen so many white people in an international immigration line. It's an influx of homogeneity. I get escorted through by a Delta whose been assigned to me through Chevron.

Dana is waiting for me outside. She's wearing white trousers and a summery top. I realise I'm lugging an unwearable wardrobe. We get in the most enormous truck which drops us off at Nina's. There's a lift but it doesn't work so we carry the cases up three flights of stairs. No big deal: there are lots of tenement blocks in Newcastle where the lifts don't work. I am a bit taken aback by the number of cockroaches lying in various positions of morbidity, it's like we've gone on stage before the curtain opens on an avant garde piece of theatre. Death and the Cockroach. There's a big puddle of water in the middle of the hall and a general warm smelliness. For some unfathomable reason there are five car tyres on the second landing. Dana has the gift of saying just what I'm getting around to thinking before I realise I'm thinking it. *"It's much nicer inside."* God, I hope so. But then what am I expecting? I've only been to

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Africa once and it was out in the bush in a tent by the side of the Zambezi.

This is urban Africa.

No one answers the bell and I feel fearful. It's 5am. Now what? We stand in the humid, fluorescent -lit, eerie silence.

My airport confidence and excitement are trickling away. I think I might want to go home soon. Dana doesn't seem bothered and I feel safe around Dana. Finally, the door opens.

And she's right it is nicer inside. Once we've woken Nina, been reprimanded for not using the elevator, I can see it's beautiful. It's nicer than my home in the UK. A little later I lie on the bed and start to relax. There's a lot to take in. I drift into a light sleep.

If this was a score to be recycled, I'd buy a ticket in World Traveller Plus, Row 21, seat A.

Day 1



The heat. It was the heat wot did me in! I had been incarcerated in the ex-finance minister's plush air-conditioned apartment since I arrived. When I alighted from the air-cooled 4x4 outside the school it was as though I'd been run over by a steamroller. And it was only 7.30 in the morning. The school had no air-conditioning. I thought I was going to pass out at lunchtime. I kept drinking bottle after bottle of water between slapping on the anti mossaie chemicals and keeping out of direct sunlight (anti-malaria medication warning.) I was an overheated, bright

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red, frizzy-haired apparition of Anglo-Saxon loveliness. The kids kept looking at me as though I were an alien.

And because I was so out of it, I didn't pick up quickly enough what was an issue for me: how to manage the ex-pat women in a way that we could draw on their resources but keep them out of the process enough to still be the main holders of the space and the event. Dana carried the day and I felt badly about it.

The day started like any management course, the participants didn't arrive on time and the power kept cutting out. So far, so familiar. But it quickly became an increasingly difficult job to find things in my memory that I could relate my experience to. No water in the loos - so we had a rain barrel and a mug to use for hand washing. No working power sockets in the gym so there were endless miles of cables carrying the electricity to our stereo system. The health and safety people would have a fit, I thought.

Apparently, all of this is 'very Angolan'. Breathe, Joy, breathe.

The musicians didn't turn up.

Two and a half hours after we were supposed to start we had most of the expected 50 young people. They ranged from 18 to late 20's. Beautiful to look at and they moved with such grace and strength my jaw dropped. I felt really white and stiff and wondered what on earth I could teach them about movement. How was I going to track their movement - my education is with Anglo-Saxon bodies?

And I made such a bad job of being translated into Portuguese. I realised that I use idiom a lot, body gestures etc. Dana spoke in such beautiful complete sentences, managing to convey the concrete as well as the spiritual in words ready for translation when they popped out of her mouth. "Blimy. I'm hot, overwrought and now I'm inarticulate as well," I thought. I kept forgetting to talk to the group as if they understood me and I would talk to him (the translator) so I lost some power in the dynamic. We discovered that he was embellishing our words. His instructions for the drawing activity produced surprising results. I wrote in my diary that night *"is this worth it? NO, NO, NO! Not like this."* I wish I spoke Portuguese.

I was told by the ex-pats (or the Chevronettes as I privately named them) not to eat the food that the caterers brought in in case of parasites. I was so hot by then that I wasn't hungry so it didn't matter. Unlike training courses I have known, the kids ate everything. Clean plates, every single one. Hunger had been one of the things they listed as a community issue. As a mother I went into the toilet and cried.

In terms of the score I think it fulfilled our intention of getting the choreography of the first part of the dance done but we lacked something. We made a mistake in the score - and on the day - of having a break after the name game. They took to that exercise really well but we lost the momentum of that by having a break.

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The visualisation and drawing exercise was ok, and it raised a list of the issues they face. Wondering if it made a difference. They found drawing much more incomprehensible than movement. One of the helpers offered the observation, from having worked with them in the past, that they are more concrete as a culture. The atmosphere by the lunch break was a bit bleak. It was hard going. The caterers hadn't arrived (and wouldn't for two hours.) And do you know what? The kids burst into impromptu dance and group games during the wait. They did what we had failed to do and they compensated. I knew then that this could be not just good but great if we followed them as well as led. If we didn't let our score rule us.

The first day of the workshop was also the first test of our working relationship. We had worked for months via ichtat, phone and email on the scores as well as a really productive day on the Sunday. But actually being in the same room as the kids and coming together is always different. We came to call the downsides of our respective styles smoochy and squooshy. Yea, yea so it's not technical but they have movement gestures that go with them and it worked for us.

Day 2



"Your blood just needs to thin a bit then you'll be fine." says Dana encouragingly. I look in the Guide Book, under 'B', for BLOOD: Thinning (how to) but can't find anything. I pull three chairs together, lie down and pour water over my head. Bliss. It's as hot as Hades and getting hotter.

Earlier today I had sat high up like a princess in the back of the chauffeur-driven Galloper. As we joggled over the uneven roads, Angolans walked by and stared impassively through the window at me.

James, Dana's husband, works for Chevron. I am Dana's guest but staying with another Chevron family. Chevron personnel are not allowed to drive, must have guards outside their homes and carry walkie-talkies in case they need assistance. This unnerves me. Am I under threat too? I feel protected as well as imprisoned. I have no sense of being in danger while we are in the school surrounded by these Angolan young people. Admittedly we have Emanuel, Dana's driver, with us acting as one of our translators but it all feels fine.

This ex-pat lifestyle is alien to me. I imagine that these women who are our helpers – in Luanda because of their husband's work - must have had to dig deep to work out who they are, how to be here, and make meaning of their lives. They are immensely likeable and very welcoming. Many do voluntary work in the community and I sense that they have a handle on local culture in a way that's different to their husbands.

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Our 8am kickoff slips because there's no one here except us. People trickle in around nine. We hear that many of them are traveling long distances to get here - by foot, bus and public 'taxi'. Some have early morning jobs. I have one of those moments I get in Ken's sessions: when I realize how small my worries are in the grand scheme of things.

Vortex dance.

The musicians haven't turned up - again. Manuel, from the group, offers to stand in.

Running through the choreography from yesterday I get the first inkling of ritual as well as performance. When they come to the front and say, "I am (name) from (hometown). I am a Youth Ambassador for Peace I have a visceral reaction. It gets me in my gut and behind my eyes.

Anything to do with the choreography is easy. They are quick, interested and creative. They are, without exception, delightful to work with. What is interesting is how quickly they want to move from their individual dance to dancing in pairs, threes or community. It is almost impossible to stop them. Their sense of community is strong. They often walk arm in arm during the breaks, boys as well as girls. Most of them have beautifully integrated posture, which fills the room with a kind of easy grace. They are very grounded in their legs. This becomes most noticeable when they create the Embondeira tree. Rather than create a high structure by climbing on each other they stand firm, tightly knit and raise their arms in the air.

In the warrior dance their traditional steps come out - a kind of shuffling and stamping. Then we try journal writing which seems much more difficult for them.

Monster drawing. The drawing went ok, but pandemonium broke out when we asked them to dance it in threes. The misunderstanding, the noise level, the microphones, and the translators adding their views... the tinkly bells for changeover got completely drowned out.

I'm not really sure that African drumming as I know it is as amazing to them as it is to me. Many of them casually play the one drum we have whenever they have a moment's free time, but it's the Samba they really like although they'll have a go at dancing to anything we play. Jazz doesn't seem to work - at lunchtime someone came over and said, "*Can you take this off and put on Enrique Inglesias?*"

At the end of lunch Almerio teaches me a new Portuguese word. In-i-ssu. It means, "Let's begin". I try it out. Judging by the reaction I get I think it must have come out as "*Turn to look at me with a puzzled expression.*" I make a large horizontal scooping gesture then point to the door with both arms. Success.

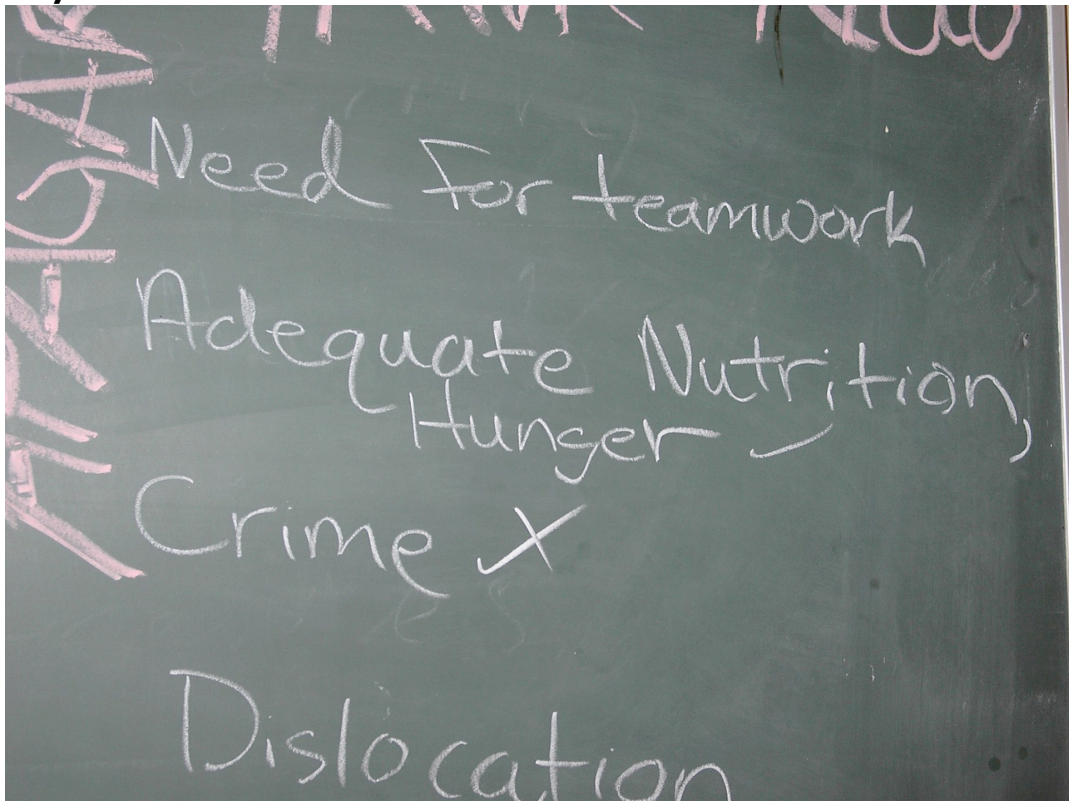
Ten people - five female, five male - become the monsters in the Monster Dance. The challenge is to get them to dance OFF the beat. Dana does a fantastic bit of coaching to get them in the mood. It's all very sociable still and we wonder what we are missing but it has been a good day.

Back in the truck on the way home I can see women carrying baskets of produce on their heads and kids selling things on the street corner. I muse on my relative place in this society if I were Angolan. Would I be the widow selling chickens over there? the teacher? the development worker? Money enables us to manage our immediate environment but we are all sisters under the skin. If I'd forgotten that before I came I sure as hell remember it now.

The ex-finance minister's apartment is on the third floor of a corner block. Two guards sit outside. It has its own elevator leading up from a shared hall. As we wait for the lift to descend the guy downstairs carries in two massive water bottles. There must be no running water on the ground floor. It's these sharp zones of transition that throw me. It's like Star Trek: "Beam me up Scottie - to the land of air-conditioning, hot showers, good food, internet access and excellent wine. Only this isn't a TV programme, it's someone's daily existence.

We'd planned to have our review in a local restaurant. It's just a block away so we walk. I trip along feeling a great sense of freedom now that I'm outside. "Slow down, walk like an Angolan so we fit in more." I do not know how Dana lives like this. She is a goddess. A corporate wife and a goddess. I love her to bits.

Day 3



I'm feeling somber this morning. Staying with a Chevron family means some heavy duty education about how the oil companies aren't the Bad Guys. I don't know any politicians to find out what they think. As I

understand it the beef is that the oil companies should be more transparent about resources and so should the government. Where is the money going when it goes from oil company to government because it isn't trickling down to the people. We have \$10,000 from Chevron which went directly to Development Workshop for this peace dance. Seems pretty transparent.

Naively when I came I wasn't really thinking about it one way or another. I have much too much to think about with the scores. What I do know is that it can't be right, people living in extreme poverty. It seems unjust that people live in such poverty on the surface of the ground, whilst vast wealth is made by extracted a natural resource from within it. This is a dichotomy too far and my head hurts. Education seems very low on the political agenda here. And health. Now I feel outraged as well as somber. And I'm sure my knowledge and understanding of this is very superficial.

I am so not a person to be facilitating a peace dance this morning. Am I becoming a closet activist?

If I'm feeling the dichotomy as a visitor, everyone else must be. The nation must be also.

I wonder if this is something the young people grapple with. And yet when I walk through the door of the gym, past the hand written sign for Danca pela paz, that mood drops away. Here, I am a resource. But, and it's a big but for me, can this be separate from the wider political issues? Everything is connected.

It raises questions like how best can I serve this group? this NGO? Ideally, Angolans should be standing here running this so how can Dana and I take this forward for them – and with them.

Today is the restoration dance, an irony not lost on me and my rumbling activist molecules.

What's the real treat about this dance is the way it evolves apparently naturally. Yesterday when the kids get to the end of the monster dance, the warriors pick them up and hug them. They are doing what's in the score but they don't know it yet. Someone steps forward to sing the restoration text and as if by magic the call and response becomes a song.

Before we go into the choreography we have free movement time, exploring movements that are nourishing and self-soothing and then partner work, mirroring, supporting and a blind walk. They are really good at mirroring. So much so that they mirror Dana and I as we demonstrate mirroring. Suddenly the room is filled with lots of Tamalpa-style arm waving. Cool. Slightly disconcerting.

Later I receive an aesthetic response from the young people: I am the Madam without tendons. This came via Dana who got it from her driver who got it from the kids. *"They've probably never seen a white woman throw herself on the floor either,"* added Dana drily.

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We head off to a local restaurant for dinner and de-brief. I love this time. We type up the programme for the performance on Saturday using Anna's book and plan the score for tomorrow. It's work but it's fun and nourishing. I cast furtive glances to see who else is in the restaurant. Mainly Europeans I would guess. I push down the thought that there was more meat on the table than an Angolan family would eat in a month.

Today has been physically nourishing, mentally challenging and emotionally draining.

Addendum

Although I didn't know it at the time, today was the day that Sarah Wykes, the British activist, was released from prison in Cabinda, the oil area of Angola. She'd flown into Luanda the week before and was being held on suspicion of breaching national security. Her 'thing' is corruption and mismanagement associated with oil revenues. Sarah works for Global Witness, the international NGO trying to break the links between natural resources, conflict, poverty, corruption and human rights.

I didn't find this story on the internet whilst I was there. Maybe I missed it. Maybe the sites were blocked. When I saw it on TV back in the UK the hairs all over my body prickled.

Day 4



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Whereas Monday had been hard going full stop, today was hard going but productive and satisfying. We start with a sound warm-up using Jamie's score followed by mapping out the Earth Run. A couple of practices. They are a little bit desultory. Dana is really good at the art and science of shaping. Aligning the concrete with the spiritual. She'd make a really good theatre director if she ever wants a career change.

You know that moment when a group starts to take more ownership? When the rigging gets pulled a bit tighter to create the space for it to happen? Slightly chaotic but exciting. Important. That came when we divided them into groups to create a closing dance.

Gil, the contact from Development Workshop, had planned only to come for the first session on Monday. He never left. He has become the main translator but whereas professional translators are a sort of permeable membrane between you and the 'other,' Gil is a vibrant, enthusiastic personage in his own right. When it's really important Dana and I have to say to him, "*Just say my words, don't add anything.*" Then we speak.

I'm getting the hang of it now, this translation business: it alters my physicality and thought process when I speak in sentences chunked up for translation. I'm getting a bit of a physical thrill out of it.

Today Gil had to work really hard flitting between Portuguese and English while we all discussed and tried to decide how we would come to a general consensus about the final choreography. At one point he disappeared and Dana found him sitting outside staring into space. These kids are much better at collaborative problem-solving when they're in movement - much more so than 'discussion.'

One is Kituxi (pronounced Ki' -toosh). When I saw him for the first time, my immediate thought was that he had Aids lesions on his face and arms. Up close I realised that these were gatherings of black pigment. Albinism. He has yellow hair, yellow eyelashes, and pale brown eyes. What a story to wear, day in, day out. Like my son he has a 'lazy' left eye. But Kituxi doesn't wear glasses. Come to think of it, no one does - which is odd in a group of 50 when a quarter of British kids need glasses. Here, what's that about? 20:20 vision or inadequate health care?

That afternoon I catch him before he leaves, but without a translator I have to resort to moving my face through a kind of non-verbal see-feel-imagine routine. He gives me a quick thumbs up and walks away.

We got it right - or our version of 'right', for right here, right now. It's a good feeling.

We're all aboard the Peace Train and we're bringin' it home.

Day 5

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Scores: 9:00 November

8:00 – 8:30 - Free movement or journal time.

8:30 – 8:45 – Explain that we're going to create the closing ritual of the dance. 5 Groups of 10. People have 1 hour to create a 10–15 minute closing ritual for all of the performers. The only requirement is that it includes acknowledging the witnesses in some way. (May use elements such as a circle, text, song, etc). Once they have created their score, they will perform it in front of the whole group (will have up to 10 minutes to do score), and we will track which elements of the dance we liked from each group.

8:45 – 10:00 Groups creating closing ritual

10:00 – 10:20 – Break

10:20 – 11:30 – Perform scores in front of witnesses. (Groups are numbered 1-5. Each takes turn, then I write in English and someone writes in Portuguese the parts of the beginning, middle, and end that they like).

11:30 – 12:00 Make check marks by the parts of the scores that you liked the best.

12:00 – 1:00 Lunch

Journey process
- Peace as peace process
- Run thru
- self p.
- Dance s.p.
- Journaling
1. Pracha dance and
last check in
November, words
- logistics

What Dana does well is frame things. She gives a beautiful frame for today and for the journey we've made this week. I wish I could do it like that.

We run through their ending dance. They want to do it three times. OK. Then a run through of the whole thing. This time feels different, more of a ritual quality.

We move into drawing the second self-portrait. Last time we did this it took them about two minutes. This time it's half an hour. An air of absorption fills the room. We do another run through of the dance from start to finish.

The Closing circle: We ask for a movement gesture and a few words. Kituxi is first. He does a simple gesture: heel clicking and outstretched arms. *"this is what we do when we feel happy."* Perfect. After that, as the thing gets in full swing, trios or pairs stand up and deliver impromptu playlets and monologues. At one point it becomes really rowdy. Movement gesture, don't forget the movement gesture...

It's a wrap. Tomorrow is the performance. Remember folks, one witness only - two at the most.

I'm tickled pink to be using Tamalpa work in this way. It feels like a gift to myself as well as something really practical and meaningful to share with others.

Tonight we dine at ChillOut. It is a beautiful beachside restaurant. Cream awnings, a gentle breeze, swooshing waves, lush music, the odd mosquito. It's us, the helpers and James, Dana's husband. It is fun, funny, lighthearted and affirming: they like what we've done. Three

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glasses of wine and I feel very very squiffy. Before we leave Dana and I sit on the sand and watch the waves. It feels like the start of having to say goodbye.

I come back and sort out my suitcase for the airport tomorrow. 90% of it has lain undisturbed all week – clothes that are too hot, too dark, just too damn unsuitable. If it were a slice through geological time, I would have only just skimmed the Pleistocene era. I bury the blue folder of my Dance for Peace notes between the layers of clothing. I have a fleeting reminder of geology maps from school: oil reserves between layers of substrata. I get ready for bed with the nice thought that my reserves are sustainable. The act of peace -making is – and always will be - a sustainable one. I only hope I can re-work the connection in my mind between oil and peace. And if not, what does this mean for our work here and elsewhere because I sense the real possibility of a future working together (me and Dana). How easy it would be to travel further and further out into remoter areas because once you get used to this it's only really a small step... How and where do I draw my line in the sand as far as safety and responsibility goes?

Earlier, my mother had phoned sounding frantic and pissed off. Apparently the tie-line into Angola hasn't been working for the last few days. We'd been able to ring out but they haven't been able to ring in. As it turns out I think the news of the detention of the British activist plastered all over British TV may have freaked her out somewhat. Maybe she thinks I'm a peace activist. I know she thinks I shouldn't be doing this – going to a war zone (as she sees it)...what with being a widow an' all... with children who need me... when there's an 'R' in the month...

Sigh. Every woman is someone's daughter.

I ring my own kids to say goodnight. I ask Jo if she'd been worried. She said "Na, we talked on ichtat this morning so I knew you were all right. Can I come next time?"

Different generation, different technologies. Different world.

I sleep really, really well.

Day 6



Imagine a cross between Danny DeVitto and Woody Allen.

Dress him in combats, a black beret and green Wellington boots. Imbue him with the kind of movement you see on a catwalk when they stop, turn, and swing out a long coat. Put him at the very epicentre of his universe. Meet Ike the cameraman sent to film Dance for Peace. "*I will be able to stop and start them to get the best shots, won't I?*" he says. In my mind I'm holding my head in my hands. Where to begin? I usher him and his tripod off the dance space.

As of 4pm yesterday, today has become a full day's workshop. Originally, it was going to be a performance plus tea and cake. I think Gil was worried that the kids would be going from 8 to 3 without any lunch so he found the extra money and it's morphed into: 10am start, run through at eleven, lunch at noon. Witnesses can arrive from 1pm onwards and the performance will be at two.

And it's turning out to have a nice leisurely feel: People cleaning the dance space, getting out the chairs, putting up pictures. Dana I sign certificates that Gil has brought for the kids. We decide we want one too.

I'm trying to get the slide show hooked up to the Development Workshop projector so that it's running during the refreshments. We're missing a cable. The laptop crashes. Claudio and I spend ages trying to fix it. In that moment, of all the issues of diversity that exist in our worlds, today we are dealing with this one: I have a mac and he has a pc. We enjoy the moment of shared understanding. Sympatico.

By eleven only half the people have arrived. No drummer. They want to do a practice run through. Afterwards I tell Dana what I've heard in musical circles (bad dress rehearsal good performance.) "*I hope so.*" Her eyelashes droop. No more practices. We eat lunch. It's delicious.

We had been told time and time again that Angolans always do things in families: they won't bring one witness, they'll bring five. At performance time there's a total of three. This isn't just timekeeping. It transpires that some of them aren't bringing any one or they asked but they couldn't come. Quite a few don't answer the question about why there are so few here.

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We wait. The kids are in their white T-shirts provided by Development Workshop, and Gil says something that would never have occurred to me. *"They're white but don't worry about getting them dirty, that's what they're for."* Bodies relax and sprawl on the floor and continue to wait. Our little faces peer through the slatted window blinds hoping to see people arrive. I feel surprised and disappointed at the lack of witnesses. A couple more turn up. We wait a bit more. Eventually, we take the decision to go ahead. It's 3.15. One hour and fifteen minutes after the time. We have about 30 witnesses, including the helpers and their partners.

More trickle in and tip the critical mass towards 50.

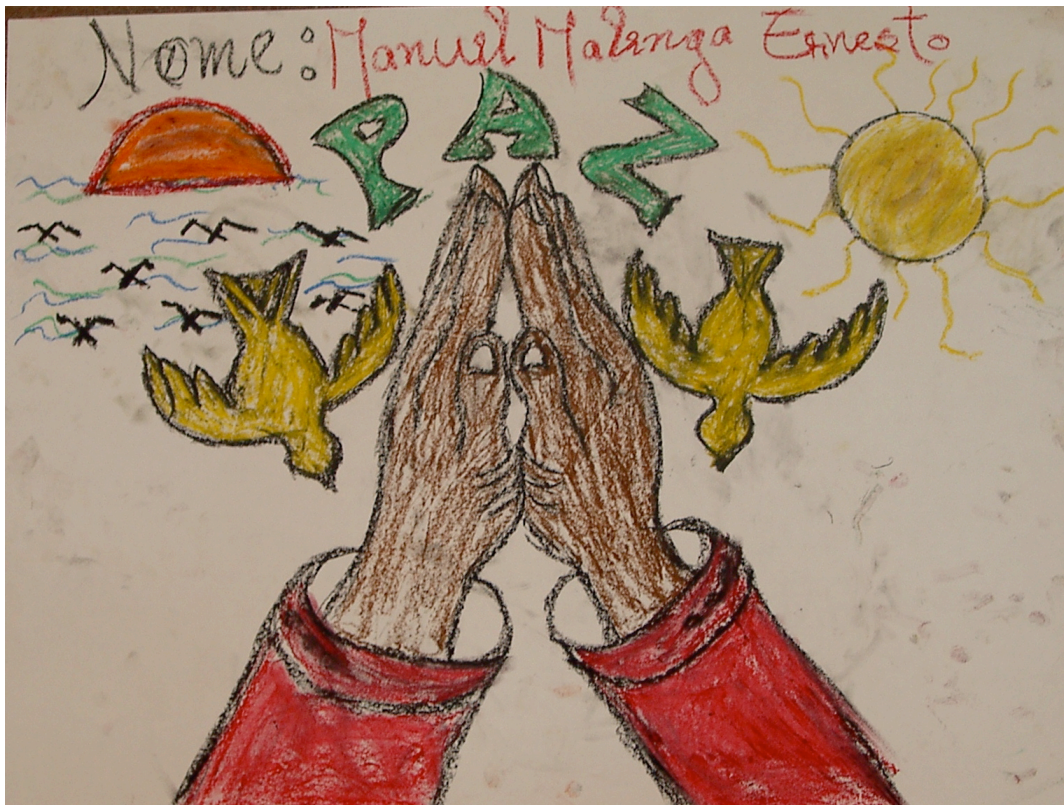
Standing in a circle holding hands, we say our last words and leave them to it. They have said that they're not nervous: they don't seem it. Nor do they look especially excited. Everyday acts of random dancing? Dana and I go out the door and wait in what would be the wings if we had them.

From the moment the humming starts and the line of linked Youth Ambassadors for Peace comes down the steps into the concourse we just know it'll be all right. They lead the witnesses around their spiral, sit them down, and then they're off. It is beautiful. Full of hope, presence, spirited youthfulness, dreams, fun and souls shining ever so brightly. They even chuck in a bit of improvised audience participation half way through. Seamless. You couldn't see the join. The Earth Run wasn't desultory it was majestic. The prayers were of, and out of, this world.

It was a homecoming.
It was a performance.
It was a ritual.

It was theirs.

Outbound.



After I switch off my mobile, I take another peek at the business card. It reads, Eunice Manguave Inacio, Coordenadora de Projecto.

Wow, I've worked with someone who was up for the Nobel peace prize. I wasn't sure what to expect before I met her but as is usually the case she turned out to be normal – normal but doing abnormal things in abnormal circumstances. She joined in our name game exercise at the beginning of the workshop, spoke at the Earth Run and presented the certificates at the end.

Usually, I'm quite good at the imagine part of I see-feel-imagine but this time I can't, not really. Not in terms of what she must have experienced in relation to peace and war in Angola. To have played a tiny, tiny, part in her work is an honour. And one I won't forget.

The word valuation floats to the surface. Recycling a score is easy. There are many ways it could be done: small tweaks, sweeping changes, last minute ones, pre-planned ones. But what about recycling me? As a resource, how would I recycle myself? I'd keep my ability to improvise, to think on my feet. My movement tracking is coming along nicely. I'd keep my CD collection and my flexibility. I'd change my writing style, and be bolder and sharper at seizing the moment to 'push' rather than 'pull'. Be more decisive...or maybe not... I'd like to learn how to frame things more clearly. I want to really get my hands dirty in the fertile soil of reflective questioning: to know how to unearth juicy, meaty, ones.

It's been a bit of a week all round. I'm surprised there isn't a bumper sticker in Luanda that says, Chevron Does It In Pairs. I only ever met couples. And no ex-pat kids either. Mostly, the children are grown up, some are away at boarding school, and others are yet to be conceived. I

Dance for Peace Angola

have felt my widowed status keenly this week. Alone in a sort of ex-pat Noah's Ark.

I've felt Kim's presence too. On Monday, I ached for the way he would touch me on the arm and say, "Just do your bit, you can't fix everything." And the other day, when I joined the Earth Run as pacesetter, I thought of him and his work in Aboriginal communities before we met. He would have been a great resource this week.

So I ran for you that day, my dearest Kimbo, and I reckon you joined me. It was as if we were running together for Jo and Lachlan. Running in celebration of the way they seem to laugh more than they cry as each year goes by.

It felt good.

I've been away just over a week. A lot has happened in that time and it's going to take a while to let it all sink in. In one way it's always nice being away from home. I'm freed of the minutiae of mothering - the cooking, the cleaning, the scrabbling around for bus fare at 8 o'clock in the morning, and keeping the peace between a 14-year old girl and her 11-year old brother. Mostly, they self-regulate but occasionally I'm needed. I smile at the thought of their gorgeousness.

The pilot cuts through my reverie, "*Cabin crew, ten minutes to landing,*" then the mechanical whirring noise of the undercarriage dropping. I fold up my tray, seat to upright, and look out of the window. London.

There's probably some deep observation to be made about peace making in Angola and the everyday random acts of parental peace making but if there is it eludes me. I'm tired and I want to get home.

{ This last entry is for my late husband, Kim Gary Banner, 1954 - 2001 }