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When I first came to Africa, everyone had an opinion on what shots and medications I should take to ensure that I was in good health when I returned. So begrudgingly, I took shots for yellow fever and hepatitis A, as well as started on my daily dose of Malarone to help ward off malaria. So when I returned to live in Africa many were afraid that I would catch malaria and not make it out alive. Well, eight months in I can say that I still am malaria free.

Now, this is not the case for everyone I know. I have had several friends from the States suffer from malaria not once, but several times, as well as a variety of other diseases, such as typhoid, that are more indigenous to this land. Fortunate for them, there are a new variety of drugs to fight malaria and these other diseases. Therefore, what the Western world used to consider a major health scare is now minimized to flu-like symptoms.

But before malaria medicine existed in Africa, I often wondered how people fought it off. Then the other day, thanks to the help of my maid Jane, I figured out that Ghanaians used bitter leaf to help fight malaria. I was even more amazed when she started to give me a tutorial on the various trees and bushes that I had labeled as weeds.

After showing me the bitter leaf, she showed me another pointed-leaf that was used to fight high blood pressure and boosting the immune system. Then she pointed out small green shoots in the yard, which are used for children when they have runny stomach, better known as diarrhea in the States, and then pointed out a tree with white flowers on it that is used to help drain fluid from sick children.

I was amazed at her knowledge. After all, in America, we are addicted to our pharmaceutical drugs. In my opinion, many Americans would shy away from picking their own medicines and/or making plants into a tea. But then again, perhaps we are just so far removed from natural medicines we have forgotten how beneficial they can be.

It also got me to thinking that America has sold its soul to pharmaceutical companies. In a world where it is more profitable for someone to be sick rather than healthy, could society ever go back to natural cures; medicines that we can grow, pick and make ourselves? Or have we been convinced that the only way to remedy a health issue is through a $30 doctor visit and a

prescription pad. It definitely makes you wonder.

In the meanwhile, I can say that I am definitely excited to discover I have a small pharmacy in my back yard. Now the fear of malaria isn't nearly as threatening and I have arranged for Jane to pick some of the other leaf to add to my salads occasionally, after all an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. In fact, I may just turn it into a small community pharmacy. After all one man's weed is another man's medicine.