

MALAWI TRIP 2011

After our visit to the Malosa Secondary School, we went down to a local field to play games with the students, however we ended up being bombarded with young primary school aged children wanting to play with the frisbees and footballs we had bought with us as they were an unexpected luxury. A group of boys started playing a game where they tried to put a frisbee round my hat. They then saw my camera and wanted countless pictures of themselves to be taken.



The next day We went to Blantyre. The commercial capital of Malawi. It took about 2 hours to get there and the houses were a real contrast to the ones we had seen previously and become used to. It became clear that this was where the rich of Malawi lived. We went to a supermarket which was full of English foods such as Pringles and Cadburys. The only similar products we had seen elsewhere were coke and fanta in recycled glass bottles. We then went to get a pizza from a fast food place. It was a nice break from rice and it really made us appreciate the home comforts we take for granted after having been denied them for a week.

After visiting the supermarket we went to the township of Ndirandi which has a population of 0.8 million and was ridden with crime and poverty. This was shocking to see in the middle of the rich and glamorous city of Blantyre. We first went to a local church for a Malawian church service for about half an hour. We were then shown a selection of singing and dancing from local people and choir groups. The priest then asked us to sing something. We hadn't prepared so had to improvise. Kirsten & I volunteered to sing Jeff Buckley's "Halleluiah" and the Malawian people all joined in which was a lovely touch to the event.

After being introduced to a little bit of a Malawian Anglican church service in Blantyre, we went to a church back at Chilema. We were greeted by the mothers union who wanted to hug us. Even though the service was 3 hours long and all in Chichewa the time flew by. I think it's because we were all mesmerised by the singing of the choirs which was a focal part of the service. It was strange because it was similar to a

traditional English service, yet also had elements of traditional African tribes and culture. For example, the women were expected to sit on one side of the church in the less comfortable looking areas, and the men in the other. This was an example of how differently women and men are treated in Malawi.

Another example we were shown of where women are treated differently was when we were taken to a Christian volunteer group called Macobo. This was a group of women who volunteered to help in a village where nearly all the inhabitants are women and children. We were told these women were either victims of rape and abandoned by their partners, or prostitutes so the charity help care for the women with domestic tasks such as cooking and rebuilding. We were asked to help fix an 82 year old lady's hut with homemade cement made out of mud and water as cement is too expensive for most Malawians.



Kirsten learning to carry water.



Fixing the mud hut



Peanut butter

After this, we were taken back to the Macobo centre and helped to make peanut butter. Peanut butter is a good food to give to sick people due to the nutrients it contains. We were then given our own bottle to take back with us and we had it on our bread for breakfast the next day.

After breakfast we made our way down to St Luke's hospital which was about 10 minutes from where we were staying. I can safely say after seeing the conditions in this hospital, I will think twice about complaining about the NHS. We first looked at the HIV treatment and testing area. The queue was huge and the people would be waiting there for several hours just to pick up medicine. We were told that the HIV problem was so big in Malawi that they often run out of the medicine needed to help people infected as they only get deliveries of medicine twice a year. We then went to the male ward and then the female ward. The beds looked very hard, however we asked the nurse if they ever ran out of beds but they said they didn't. Mainly because the patients only stayed in if they were being operated on which was quite rare. Afterwards we went to the paediatricians unit where a child had just been diagnosed with malaria. Many of us had tears in our eyes as the child screamed, however we were reassured that this case of malaria had been caught early so the child had a good chance. Many Malawians however are not so lucky.



Male ward. St lukes hospital

After our tour round St Luke's we went into the head nurses office where we presented money and the supplies we had donated. We could not bring any drugs over with us, but we gave them lots of sterile bandages, first aid kits and our own supplies of medicines such as paracetamol and rehydration sachets. We were then shocked to find out that there was not a single doctor in the whole of the hospital and it was run entirely by nurses. There are only about 250 doctors in the whole of Malawi and the British doctor who was at St Luke's had recently returned to Britain.

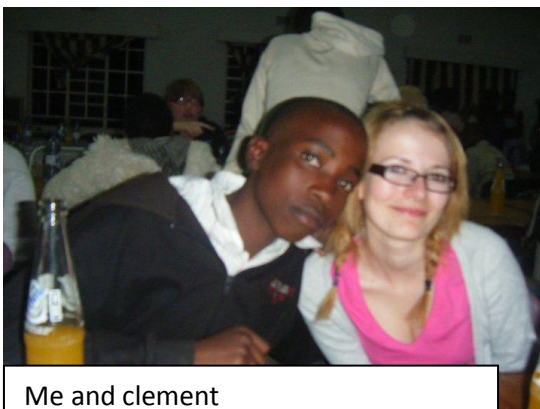
We were then taken to the dental ward. My fear of dentists was made ten times worse after seeing this dental room. The dental tools looked worn and rusty and at closer inspection we saw hundreds of ants crawling over them.



Ants on the dental equipment

To lighten our spirits after the shock of the hospital, we returned to Malosa School to meet the students. We then climbed a nearby mountain with them. However it was quite steep so we resorted to dragging each other up there. A girl called Future held onto my bag and gave me a cheeky smile when I gave her a mock annoyed face. It was a sign of how comfortable we had become in each other's presence and there wasn't a Bishop Ramsey - Malosa divide. We then climbed an even bigger mountain called Zomba Plateau. Kirsten & I were talking to a boy called Clement from the school who had taken quite a shine to Kirsten, he was from Blantyre but lived with his aunt and uncle. We were saddened to hear that he hadn't seen his mother in 2 years and hadn't met his 2 year old sister. However, he assured us she was visiting him this summer and he seemed quite excited about it.

I was then noticed by the schools photographer for my DSLR camera. His name was Richard and we spent a good hour talking about photography. He then went round with my camera taking pictures of the surroundings and was fascinated by the zoom lens. It was sad to see his passion for photography couldn't be used more frequently and he was shocked that I was learning photography at school. In fact all the students seemed shocked that I was studying art, drama and photography as all their ambitions were highly academic aspiring to be mainly doctors and accountants and art was a fun after school club not to be taken seriously.



Me and clement



Me and Richard

To be continued..