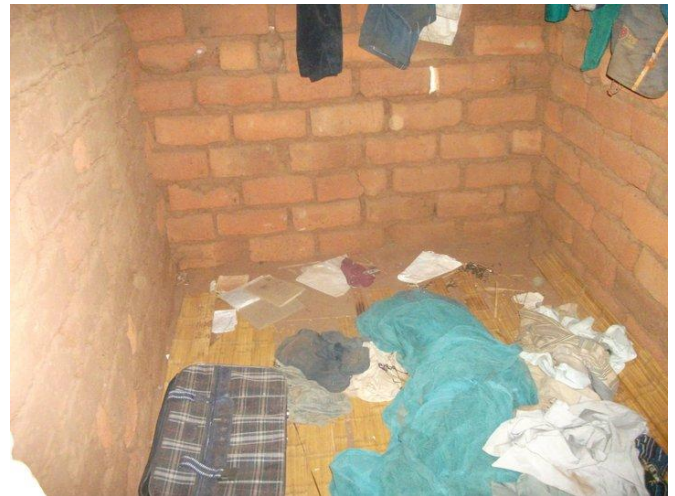


MALAWI TRIP 2011

The trip to Malawi was a cultural exchange not just for us but for the Malosa students as well. We therefore spent about 3 hours teaching them ICT skills on dated computers. It was weird to see them struggle with the skills which were second nature to us. We also set a lot of them up with Facebook accounts so they could keep in contact with us. Many of them had email addresses as well so we exchanged them too. I still keep in contact with one boy Clement on Facebook as it is the easiest way of communicating. They have to pay for a post-box and letters to Malawi can take between 6 months and a year to arrive!

After teaching them ICT skills we were told to pair up with a Malosa student as we walked to a nearby village. I spoke to a girl called Christina who, after we had exchanged names said, "we are now best friends yes?" She taught me Chichewa words which I struggled to pronounce and she found hilarious! Once arriving at the village we had to meet with the village chief to gain permission to enter the village. It felt like a different world. Once we had permission, we were shown round one house. There were no lights and it consisted of 3 rooms. One room was where the maize flour was kept, one room was the parents' bedroom and the other was for the 6 children. I was shocked at the children's room. It was smaller than my own bedroom, yet 6 children were expected to sleep here on the floor. We were then shown the bathroom. It was a communal bathroom which was constructed with leaves and branches for privacy. There was then a bowl filled with water on the floor and a few sponges. It was like no other bathroom we had seen before.



After leaving the village we by chance came across a traditional Malawian dance celebrating the circumcision of a boy. We were told we were very lucky to have witnessed this as not many westerners have done so.

Sooner than any of us had wanted, it was time to say goodbye to the students at Malosa as we were moving on to other parts of Malawi. We hadn't realised how many friends we had made at the school until it was time to say goodbye to them. We presented the school with the donations we had brought over. We also presented them with about 250 pounds to fix their maize mill which Bishop Ramsey School had donated to them about 12 years ago. They then presented us with a small hand carved wooden animal each and the teachers gave us all a hug. This was very humbling as they have so little, yet spent what would have been a lot of money to them on us. My rhino has taken pride of place in my room. I was then given this letter written by Clement:

14 - 07 - 20011

Hi Lauren,

I don't have much to say, all I just want is appreciate on your behaviour, so nice. You are a true friend of mine. Thank you for your love which you showed during this period for accepting as your friend at first sight. A matter of sharing experiences is part of my lifestyle, indeed the world is round so that friendship may encircle it.

I just want to wish you all the best. I will miss you. But I will still be communicating to you through facebook.

Lastly pass my regards to your mum, dad, sister brother and all your friends.

With lots of love from
XClementX

I was then found by Richard, the photographer. As he was using my camera with Rebecca's lens on it, he came up to me and said "Lauren, I have been looking for you. This is for you and this is for your sister" and presented me with 2 wooden giraffes. Rebecca was surprised at being given a gift from a random Malawian man and I think she was annoyed that I got out of buying her a souvenir!.. None the less she was grateful for the gift. We then spent the rest of the time at the school dancing to traditional Malawian music with the students until late into the night.

The next day we had to wake up early as we needed to drive for 3 hours to Monkey bay. We first picked up the acting head boy at Malosa and gave him a lift home as he lived near Monkey Bay as we had space in our minivan for one more person. We were also accompanied by a Swiss woman called Eva who was staying at Chilema and we had made friends with. Our first stop was to a blind school and the Nkope Health Centre. We had a tour round the centre and its problems were very similar to St Luke's - lack of doctors and equipment. However, an organisation from England called MACS (Malawi Association for Christian Support) were also there and they were doing repair work on the health centre and the school. MACS were later caught up in the protests in Malawi (mentioned later) that we narrowly missed and the

Army threw tear gas into the house they were staying in. Luckily no one was hurt. The people from MACS explained their charity to us and told us about their current projects. We were then introduced to the blind school. These children were amazing. They had permanent smiles on their faces although they are constantly challenged with the stigma blind people in Malawi are often faced with. Many families find it shameful to have a blind child and these children are often sent away or locked away from everyone else. They sang us many songs in English and Chichewa. Their singing was incredible and one boy was even playing on a guitar. We were told they had practiced for weeks to welcome us and it was their favourite lesson. We then gave them sensory gifts suited to blind people such as balloons and items that make noise as well as a cash donation.



After visiting the blind school we made our way down to Lake Malawi. The lake is enormous and takes up nearly a quarter of the country. Malawi is a landlocked country but there is sand, and the lake even made little waves which made us feel like we were on a beach. We were soon noticed by a group of local children



who were intrigued by the Mzungu's (Chichewa term for white person which is also used in Zambia and Mozambique). We stayed there for several hours before looking round the local village where we were approached by the first drunk person we had seen in Malawi. He was drawn to Rhys so Rhys had to say 'iyai' which is 'No!' in Chichewa. It was a term we were told to use quite sensitively as it is rather forceful, but it worked and the man kept his distance.

To be continued....