

Dear Family and Friends,

It is Saturday and the beginning of week four for us in Malawi. Next week at this time we will be on our way to the airport to catch the first of several flights that will take us back home to Fort Worth.

The mornings begin early in Malawi (around 5a.m. as it is summer here) and with the first ray of sun the birds begin their song. It should be easy to go back to sleep but within minutes the night guards are washing the vehicles and talking as if they have not had the entire night to converse. The water faucet and hose are located just outside our bedroom window and I suspect the guards think that because they are awake and the sun is peeping over the horizon that everyone else should be awake!

Last week while we were in Lilongwe our two housemates departed for the USA so when we returned on Sunday night we were welcomed by two new housemates, Ryan and Kate. Ryan is a senior fellow in pediatric intensive care at Northwestern University in Chicago and Kate is doing research as a volunteer as she waits to enter medical school in the fall. It is great fun sharing the house with these young adults and I applaud their parents for raising such fine offspring.

John, Ryan and Kate were all out of the house by 7 am this morning to make rounds on the malaria ward so I enjoyed a leisurely couple of hours. The house girl does not work on Saturday or Sunday so it is nice to have the house to myself and listen to my radio for the latest news from BBC without interruption; It rained for about an hour this morning and after the rain I went outdoors to select fresh flowers for the two flower vases in the house. Well, sort of vases, as one is a clear glass mug of unknown origin. The other is a large stoneware teapot made at a factory just up the M-1 highway in Dedza and hand painted with a scene of a traditional village. It has a large crack down the side so it can no longer be used for tea but makes a perfect flower vase. The flower arrangements are beautiful and with the freshness of the morning I feel a bit sad that we will be departing in a week.

Yesterday it rained five times. There were five heavy downpours; then the clouds move a bit, the sun may shine for awhile and then it starts all over again. Some of the maize looks to be 10 feet tall but I am told that much rain is still needed for the ears to mature.

One morning last week while I waited for John outside the Malaria Alert Center I noticed a young employee who walked from the building, picked up a long tree branch and swung it at a tree. Down fell several guava which she picked up and started to eat. When she saw me watching her, she offered me one but I politely declined saying that I had a similar tree in our backyard and my house girl had used several guava for the fruit salad she prepared last night. "Fresh fruit for breakfast" takes on a whole different meaning after this brief encounter with the young woman and the long tree branch!

Now that the windows at K-1 are clean and William the gardener has been here to trim the foliage in front of the windows, the view from the living room is amazing, especially at sunset. Off to one side beyond this valley of tall lush maize are the dormitories for the Malawian medical students and on a recent evening when Manchester United and Liverpool were playing soccer on satellite television we could hear the cheers and shouts throughout the evening. At first we did not know the reason for these sudden outbursts but after a quick consultation with the guards, our curiosity was quelled. We were unable to watch this exciting game as K-1 has no television but nonetheless, we felt the excitement.

We are situated in the heart of the medical district of Blantyre and if you go to Google Earth and can find Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital, we are just down the road. The city is built on a series of hills and the setting is quite beautiful. Everything is green, in a hundred different shades. The large yellow flowers on the acacia tree, the fat red blooms of the flame tree and a landscape dripping with fresh bananas, papayas and guava...for a moment I could imagine I was on some tropical paradise island.

While in Lilongwe last weekend we were inundated with beggars. There is one street in particular where they hang out because this area is frequented by "westerners." We had a couple extra loaves of bread and a big bunch of ripe bananas in the car so we were able to share; After driving to Burger Land, tucked behind Tut-la's Market near the street patronized by the westerners, I was surprised to see a familiar face. It was Goodsen, one of the boys I would regularly feed in the fall of 2005 and winter of 2006 during the time of the severe famine. I was amazed to see how tall he had grown. When I called him by name, he answered. We did not need a tape measure to gauge the circumference of his arms to check for malnutrition...it was written all over his body. Accompanied by his blind uncle, he had no doubt left the village in the morning for his daily trudge through the streets begging for food.

John and I had a brief huddle and decided we would provide him with money for food since we had exhausted our supply of bread and bananas. I rolled up a wad of bills and put in the palm of his hand so the others would not see and told him to return to the village at once. Then they were gone. John and I watched in silence as Goodsen led his blind uncle through the alley to the street that would take them to the village. I vividly remember the first time I encountered Goodsen in this group of young barefoot boys begging for food. They were congregated outside the fence of the compound where John's office was located. I was waiting in the car for John to come after

work and these boys approached me. I had several bags of Malawi peanuts in the car that I distributed to them. Goodsen was the only one who hesitated, then said "Thank you madam and God bless you." That is when I asked him his name.

If I could, I would pluck him from this existence, get him adequately nourished and put him in school. Oh sure, it could be done but what about the thousands of others in the same plight? Perhaps I will shop for clothes for him before I return in May. He told me he has a mother and a younger sister who also live in the village; his father is dead. The quiet morning did not last long as a call came from John that I was needed for a mission.

There are times I stop what I am doing and go to the pharmacy downtown to check on a medication for one of John's patients but this time it is the refrigerator. I am giving some TLC to the house and one of the items that is needed is a new refrigerator. There are only three stores that carry appliances so I had done the shopping and had selected the refrigerator that best served the needs of the house. The office administrator was to purchase it that morning but she is busy trying to reschedule an airline ticket for Ryan (our house mate) whose flight on Air Malawi has been canceled. (Their fleet of aircraft has recently been downsized from three aircraft to one...more on that later...perhaps. I did procure the refrigerator and I am thankful because it was the last one of this style and it was on sale. It will be delivered on Tuesday. I can only imagine what the house girls will say when it is delivered. When the small, least expensive, no bells or whistles microwave was brought into the kitchen on Friday, they danced and shouted "we are rich!"

We have had two house girls for the last couple of weeks. Naomi is very pregnant and could deliver any day. Her child (sex unknown, like it used to be...before ultra-sound) will join "Wisdom," her two year old son. Her husband owns a mini-bus and she told me he has a good route. Pauline is her replacement while she is out on maternity leave. But for these two weeks she is here for the transition and because there has been a lot of activity with various people coming and going. We have had numerous dinners, some by candle light (not by choice but necessity) and then someone has to wash all those sheets by hand and iron them. The painters who will paint the entire inside of the house are scheduled for Monday; the carpenter who is replacing the screening on the windows and some of the louvers is coming on Tuesday. I have a feeling this week will fly. I better turn off the lights and crawl under the mosquito net.

I can hear the guards talking...that is a good sign...perhaps they will let me sleep until 6 am. More later.