

# A Visitor Brings A SHARP RAZOR



*10 Months in the Warm Heart of Africa – Malawi  
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# A VISITOR BRINGS A RAZOR BLADE

## *10 Months in the Warm Heart of Africa*

*“Mlendo ndi amewe amabwela ndi kalumo kakuthwa” - A visitor is the one who comes with a sharp razor blade.*

This Malawian proverb so apply describes the experience we had in Malawi during the 10 months of residency in Lilongwe, the capital city. It only seemed right to entitle this little booklet this way. We arrived in Malawi to bring a healthy supply of American “wisdom” and departed 10 months later with a healthy supply of the grace and kindness of African wisdom.

This proverb was shared with us by Theresa and Lotan, faculty members of African Bible College and two of the most gregarious Malawians we met, over a wonderful Malawian meal (United States Thanksgiving for us). As Connie and I considered teaching a *Marriage and Family* class the next semester we were discussing whether there was a need for us to teach such a class.

Theresa and Lotan assured us that our opinions and encouragement to the students would be well taken as according to them Malawians are very open to teaching from foreigners, but not necessarily their friends next door. If something needed to be said about marriage and family they assured us, we the palefaces, would be right for the job!

The respect shown in relationships throughout the Malawian society is so contrary to Western culture that it challenged all our rebellious tendencies to the core. After the initial shock, it was a breath of fresh air in a society torn by poverty, infant mortality, and AIDS.

Malawi is by no means a perfect society as you will see in these pages. In fact, I hope you will gain both an appreciation and a disdain for Western customs and culture! In a society of such misery we saw a culture of incredible patience and kindness...a far cry from the whimpering, whining me-ism of America. But, the Malawian difficulties are profound and deeply inbred by years of traditional religion, colonialism and imperialism.

At this writing we have been “home” in the United States for almost 2 years. Soon after arrival on American soil, on a trip visiting friends in a large city (we live in a town of 7,000 people) my son, Joel and I were noting all the African Americans in the store and were reminded of a quote in a lovely little book on Malawi we read while there called “Venture to the Interior”. The author quoted a friend as saying he was “missing all those black faces” while back in the United Kingdom.

By the way, Malawi is found sitting in the crook of Mozambique on the southeastern portion of the great continent of Africa. Its size is comparable to a half of the state of Wyoming in the United States.

I hope that these letters home to friends and family during our 10 month stay will encourage your heart, challenge your mind and give you at least a slight taste of the *Warm Heart of Africa* that is Malawi.

## **August 10, 2003 (approximately)**

I promised all sorts of people that I would send them daily updates...actually, quite the opposite. However, there is so much to tell!

### **SETTLING IN AFRICA**

We are doing well and settling in at the African Bible College in Lilongwe, Malawi. However, the drive from the airport to the college was quite overwhelming. As much preparation as I tried to have in readiness for the poverty, it is absolutely daunting. I have yet to see a "nice" part of town, though we haven't gone too terribly far from this side of Lilongwe. According to Paul Chinchon, the president of the college, Malawi is ranked either 4<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> poorest in the world!

People are everywhere on the roads selling everything from tomatoes to turkeys (alive of course), walking somewhere, bicycling somewhere, just about running over something or someone! I have finally driven off campus a couple times...left side, coming within centimeters of walking and riding people on the side of the road.

### **AFRICAN BIBLE COLLEGE**

The folks at the college have been incredibly helpful and kind. They had arranged for our first 3 days of dinners in three different homes. We live next to the founder on one side and the president on the other side. Geckos are all over the house – this is good as they eat the mosquitoes!

The students at the college are a very special lot. There were over 500 applicants this year for 64 places in the freshman class. In fact, 64 is a huge class, but ABC wants to help as many students as possible. It costs about \$2500 per year to educate one student and the students each pay \$900 of that. So, financially it is difficult for the college and the student!

### **OUR HOUSE**

Our house is really very nice, especially for African standards, with good sized rooms and lovely mosquito nets! The backyard has mango, papaya, banana, and pear trees. This is in addition to the garden that has an interesting leaf to eat, carrots, beans, onions, and some other items.

### **CLIMATE TURNED UP-SIDE DOWN**

Right now Malawi is coming out of winter and it is quite beautiful (weather-wise). Very dry (as much as Wyoming) and the grass is brown. It is not tropical here, which I had somewhat expected it to be. The flowers however are gorgeous. It is supposed to become hot in September and into October, and then start raining and cool off at that point.

### **A THIRD WORLD CITY**

Our two trips into the city have been fascinating. There really isn't a city like we think of. It is like just a bunch of poverty-stricken developments and then some shops that are a mix of newer (7-11, Nandos, Shoprite) and really run-down places. Again, we have not visited the newer part of the city where they built the capital. That comes on Tuesday next week I think.

There are guards at the main parking lots to keep a watch and control traffic because there are cars everywhere! Every few moments someone tries to stop you or comes up to you to sell something or ask for money. Groceries can be purchased in a grocery store – where we outfitted our house – or from various vendors on the road. Some of the folks here actually work with one particular vendor. They bring a list of the items they want and the vendor rounds them up from the various sellers. Connie tried it for the first time today. Her vendor is Michael. They do a bit of bartering and decide on prices.

There are not many "Azungu" (whites) around. We obviously scream "wealth" and so are uncomfortable with that feeling! We filled 2 carts of stuff for the house and felt like we needed to explain to the checker that we

were new and had 4 children. After doing so, we realized that that means little to them as they can't afford any of the stuff we were purchasing!

### **BILLIONS OF KWACHAS**

While in the shopping area we also got registered at the money bureau to exchange money. Right now the dollar is worth about 100 of their dollars (kwacha). So, we went away with 100 bills totaling nearly K 50,000 (\$500). AND, they are larger than our bills! Laura Chinchen had told us it was like having "Monopoly" money. We now understand.

### **HOUSEKEEPERS AND GARDENERS**

Our housekeeper and cook, Robeson, is very kind and works well. We are terribly uncomfortable with this whole household employee thing. It is a great service to them and to us, but a bit invasive in the family life. He is here in the morning and then late afternoon at this point. Apparently, even poorer Africans employ poorer relatives as household help.

### **PREPARATION FOR TEACHING**

I began working on school things today, meeting with Paul and discussing classes. I am trying to be as flexible as possible so that I am of use to them in their cultural context. Paul is a great deal of help and we should have it worked out by the time I leave!!!

He made it very clear yesterday that it is very easy to get wrapped up in taking care of immediate problems of the people – food, clothing, housing, etc – and miss out on training leaders that will have a more lasting effect on the country. That certainly doesn't discount serving the physical needs as the students and staff at ABC spend at least one day a week working in the villages, orphanages, or prisons among other things.

### **A LITTLE HISTORY**

According to Paul, Britain left Malawi in quite a state. They had no paved roads between the major cities, no universities, few schools and no real developed resources. The only export they have is tobacco.

The first president was a doctor, who worked in Scotland for a number of years, and was a member of the Presbyterian denomination here. He was basically a dictator, but Paul said he had a vision for Malawi that he went to great lengths to fulfill. They now have a university system, paved roads, and some governmental infrastructure. However, they still have no economy!

We will be off to a British tea with a family off campus tomorrow. It is quite amazing how many countries are represented in the area. It will be a real treat to be around so many different cultures!

Well, that is a huge chunk. Maybe that will be the longest of the year! Let's hope so. Thank you for reading it. We appreciate your prayers and interest in our adventure!

Sincerely,  
The Dehnerts

**August 25, 2003**

Mwansuela Bwanji (good afternoon),

For a week and a half I have concerned myself mostly with trying to deal with this culture and get comfortable with it. I reached a point two days ago on our New Teacher Orientation Walkabout that I thought that that moment may never come.

### **NEW TEACHER ORIENTATION**

We were assigned by Paul Chinchen, ABC Director, a student guide and a list of items to purchase in various locations. Those locations included a village nearby, an outdoor market near the post office, and an outdoor

market “across the bridge”. The city of Lilongwe is actually mostly made up of villages of 5,000 or so people each that simply look like bush villages in Africa.

Our village was Chimalame, which is where Robson, our housekeeper, and Ernest, my band instrument repairman / helper, live. It was an unbelievably depressing place with darling, dirty, hardly dressed children running around. Horribly dirty outdoor shops lined the dirt roads in town.

We were to find the Chief and get a picture with him, also asking to be in his village (a polite thing to do). We found his wife and got the picture. We also met Mayi Khosa (Mrs. Khosa) who wanted her whole family in a picture and in quite good English told us she wanted a copy of the picture (we brought a print to her a couple weeks later). She breastfed the baby while rounding up all her children and maybe more, and proceeded to introduce her eldest daughter, Loveness (I have no idea how to spell her name).

After this, we walked back to the highway and jumped (crammed) into a mini-van that they use for busses and headed for the downtown area. There we ate pizza and spring rolls at Ali Babbas (go figure). Then we bartered down to 100 Kwacha (\$1) for a beautiful wicker basket to carry our purchases in.

### **OVER THE BRIDGE**

The most fearful adventure was yet to come as we ventured “across the bridge” to what is not kindly called “Indian Town”. This area has more warnings attached than anything in the region as it supposedly is ripe with pick pockets, various acts of violence, etc. We were told that during the day there isn’t much violence, but keep a close tab on wallets.

“Across the bridge” we were to go to the Central Market which is the distribution point for nearly all the street vendors throughout the city. Generally, you do not barter as the prices are as low as they go. The shops are all basically just shacks all crammed together in an area about the size of one city block. You can purchase just about everything and all categories are arranged in various regions of the market.

We bought crushed nuts, Chinese cabbage, maize, and a live chicken! We were supposed to buy two, but were running out of money...which of course was part of the whole orientation as we were supposed to bring only a certain amount and if we overspent we would not be able to afford the mini-bus ride back to ABC!

We did make it back to ABC and felt a great deal of relief upon walking in our door, safe and sound in our lovely home once again.

### **SPIRITUAL LESSONS**

Having given you this huge amount of explanation of our experiences here, it is about time I gave you some kind of idea of how this has effected the Dehnerts. Upon returning to campus, we were told that part of the idea of the orientation is to give us a crash course in what it is like to be a Malawian; to travel like some of them travel, to buy the things they buy, to have a limited budget. Of course, the budget was much higher than most Malawians and most Malawians don’t use the mini-busses!

The experience was supposed to take the edge off the fears involved in moving around here. For Connie and me, I think it actually expanded those fears and by that evening I was ready to get the year over with and get back to my comfortable middle-class existence in the United States. Quite frankly, that made me more fearful; to think that I would be here a whole year afraid to leave the campus! What a rotten way to live...and those were my exact thoughts that night and the next day!

The morning of the second day after orientation I sat up in bed and prayed that the Lord would please help me to get my attention off my own belly button and begin thinking about serving others. Our whole family headed to town that morning to barter for a few things, go to Shoprite (grocery store), go the British Airways offices, and the United States Embassy in the new part of the city (we had never been) to register our presence here in Malawi.

It was a new experience that day as the Lord lifted so many of those fears and helped me to engage the vendors in the market, work on speaking the language, and just generally get my sight off self! What a relief and wonderful spiritual lesson that I have learned so often but so often forget...when we think of others, we don't think of ourselves!

## **CONCLUSION**

I just want you to know that I am only talking about myself and the fact is that the children are all having an absolute blast here! The campus is now full of instructors and families as of yesterday. Lots of kids and lots of fun! They are loving all the unique things of this place...it is a thrill a minute for them I think!

We appreciate your prayers and the support and notes we have been receiving. Thanks for reading all this stuff!

Dapita,  
Kelly & Connie

## **September 1, 2003 (approximately)**

Dear Friends,

### **POVERTY AND WEALTH**

We face such a difficult quandary here in Malawi. Unlike being in America we are surrounded at every turn by poverty with a very few having all they need. The old adage that missionaries are poor, live on used tea bags, or old clothing is not the case in a country like Malawi.

We spent a lovely afternoon a couple weeks ago with David and Andrea Taylor. Dave has been a Navigators missionary in Malawi nearly 15 years. David made the comment at one point that we live a contradiction here in this poverty stricken country. I knew immediately what he meant though we were not talking about our wealth at that moment.

Connie and I were just sitting in our khondie (porch) looking out at our Poinsettia tree (yes, tree), banana tree, and red brick wall (that surrounds the campus) with electric wiring on top. We were thinking, "Wonder what is on the other side of that wall...hope it stays there!"

We were mostly joking, but those things that we take for granted are no longer available here. All of a sudden anything over fifty cents is a lot of money. Can you imagine that? 50 cents, not a hundred dollars or a thousand...50 cents! How do we as westerners drive around in a car that costs thousands of dollars? They walk. How do we purchase meat for \$2.50? They eat a corn (maize) mush that costs about \$8 a month with maybe some vegetables twice a day...maybe enjoy a bit of tea for breakfast!

It is going to be a fascinating year figuring out how to think Christianly about this culture of poverty.

### **LIONS, TIGERS AND INSECTS, OH DEAR**

After talking some time with Perry and Brenda Janson (medical missionaries at ABC Clinic) and the Taylors we began laughing about the fact that every insect, animal and plant that lives here does not "want to bite you, but if they do they will kill you". It really is a joke, but it really is amazing how many things are dangerous here. There is a reason I had 10 shots before coming and we take medicine every week.

Snakes that show up on campus periodically are the Black and Green Mambas and Spitting Cobra. One teacher made note that when the mamba raises up you need to heed the warning, run, and climb on something high. In disbelief we asked if they chase people and he said, "Yes."

On the more positive note of reptiles, the children have a chameleon now that is quite the clever fellow! They are interesting looking and have rather long tongues to get their insects!

## **LITTLE AMERICA**

The Evangelical Association, trying not to be too simplistic, nonetheless noted that Malawi's physical needs (food, water, agriculture, health) can be traced back to its spiritual state. As David Taylor noted, Livingstone (ground breaking missionary in Africa) was here over a hundred years ago. I asked why after being "Christianized" in essence by those early missionaries, Africa is still in such a spiritually dark state.

David asked rhetorically what the British Isles looked like after one hundred years of missionary work. Though I know little of British history, I understand Britain was not in great shape at that time either. There is yet much work to be done here in Africa. The United States is slipping on the downward slope of post-Christian thought but has hundreds of years of Christian heritage and influence as a mooring. Africa has none of that.

Some refer to the African Bible College campus as "Little America" because of the fact that there are many Americans in addition to the students (who are all Africans) that live here and primarily spend their time here. However, there are many missionaries in Malawi, but not many opportunities for young Christian men and women to be disciplined and trained in their faith that they might become the Christian leaders that Malawi needs.

This is the goal of ABC. Though feeding the hungry and clothing the poor is an ever present need and mission of the many organizations in Malawi (ABC or other agencies), the training of leaders must be our primary focus of ministry while teaching at ABC and living amongst the students. As was noted in our faculty staff meeting a week ago, we must, as missionaries, be giving the Malawians the tools to carry on the training of Christians here because we do not know how long we will be here. Zimbabwe is not renewing missionary work permits... are there nationals that are trained that can carry on the work?

The Presbyterian church in Malawi has pastors that oversee nearly 10 prayer houses, sometimes more. Prayer houses are in essence churches with sometimes 100 members. Therefore, the pastors may actually preach at their own church 4 or 5 times a year and the elders will preach the rest. The problem lies in the fact that the elders are usually untrained and so the teaching is most often rather inadequate for a healthy church.

The "non-governmental organizations" are everywhere here! Signs pointing to the offices of various aid organizations are on every corner. The good work that many of them do is balanced by the failure of the organizations in developing a dependent society. ABC hopes to change the whole person and it is the prayer of everyone on campus that Christ might increase, while they decrease!

## **SOME STATS**

The Malawi government publicized the fact that they only recognize degrees obtained from the University of Malawi and the African Bible College.

There were over 500 applications for 68 positions in the freshman class this year! The students who come to ABC want to be here...there is no real problem with absenteeism or lack of interest in classes.

ABC Christian Academy (Kindergarten through 9<sup>th</sup> grades) will have 165 students from 22 nationalities this year.

## **STRETCHING**

A week ago, Connie was approached by Nell Chichen, Registrar, and asked to teach Freshman English at the College. The usual faculty member who teaches it has a rather large load and wants some help! After much prayer and pulling of hair it was determined that Connie would come out of retirement and jump up a few grades!

## **PRAYER ITEMS**

1. For Connie as she teaches English...her first language, their second!
2. That we teach well within the context of this culture, preparing the students to be leaders.
3. For Brit, Joel, Shea and Janelle as they meet new friends at school.
4. For ABC Uganda that hopes to open its doors in 2005.
5. For ABC Swaziland that needs a great deal of funding to begin construction.

6. For Kelly as he trains ABC graduates to carry on music courses next year at ABC.
7. For a unity of vision and humility among missionaries.

Thanks for your prayers,  
Kelly and Connie and kids (and Milo)

One of Connie's Freshman English class students wrote:  
"The college will lead me to make the best of both homes, heaven and earth." Limbani

## **September 10, 2003 (approximately)**

Dear Friends,

We are all in school at last! Right now, Connie is teaching her English class. It went well the first day...it didn't convince her to go into college teaching, but was thankful to get through it with all 55 students!

My first two days included Music Theory and Introduction to Music in addition to instrument placement exams for the beginner players. After all the incredible singing here I had decided to have my classes sing at the beginning of each class. I asked them to teach me songs and told them that I would teach them some.

I asked if they knew the "Doxology". One student in the Intro course said she did and the rest said no. So I started singing with the words projected on the wall. Within two lines, the entire class was singing and singing in harmony! It was one of the most amazing musical experiences of my life.

I told them that we are taught how to read music in school at a very young age in the United States, but do not sing! They are so hungry to learn how to read music. My theory class has 25 students in it. One missionary told me of a conference that he went to in South Africa that included both foreign and African missionaries and teachers. Each meeting they had started with the foreigners wanting to get on with business and the Africans wanting to sing!

When asked to write a paragraph answering the question, "Why Music Theory", I received the confirmation that I bring something of value to these students. A consistent response was that they want to learn how to read music and write down their music. They want the tools to be able to pass on their music, learn new music, and enjoy more of God's precious gift!

### **CHAPEL**

I did more speaking and yelling than ever before this past Friday. As the new faculty member at ABC I was asked to give my life story (how I went from atheist to Christian) in Chapel. Following the service, Nell Chichen (founder of ABC) came up to Connie and me to let us know that she had met the American Ambassador's Undersecretary the night before and he is from Wyoming! He was excited to know that another Wyomingite is in Lilongwe. She was going to let him know that my speaking in Chapel was going to be on ABC Radio in the morning. I was thankful that she told me I would be on radio AFTER I spoke! [Thomas Dougherty, Undersecretary, became a friend over the year and was kind enough to invite my parents to lunch at his home when they came in April – he is now moving to a war-torn country in Africa and missing the peace and beauty of Malawi]

I opened my talk with the Chichewa "good morning". They responded in kind (though a bit surprised) and I told them that they speak Chichewa very well. It took probably five seconds before they understood my statement and laughed at my first attempt at humor!

In keeping with the "new kid on the block" concept, I was asked to Emcee the Ice Cream Social to welcome the freshmen that evening. We were going to play "the Price is Right" and I got to be Bob Barker. The faculty have now decided that since they are all tired of emceeing events, they now have found a sucker for the job!

## **CHIMBALAME**

After three tries, Ernest Chikazunga, my music helper (night watchman, repairman and woodwinds player) took us to Chimbaleme (his village) near the campus. You may remember that we visited Chimbaleme on our “Orientation Outing” 3 weeks ago.

Since then, Ernest had explained that Chimbaleme is one of the dirtiest villages and has the most people in a small area in the region due to its close location to the Old Town of Lilongwe. It is the “commuter” village.

This was the first opportunity for the kids to go to a village! We sat and talked about it afterwards. Joel thought it was less poverty stricken than he expected. Britney noted she felt like a “movie star” with all the people gawking, chanting “azunga” (white men) and children chasing after us everywhere! Janelle just thought everything was “ducky”.

Ernest came to get us and we drove into the village. The dirt streets are about 1.5 car widths across with small drainage ditches (you can drive in them) along the sides. People were everywhere. The 8-12 year olds had just come back from “camp” in the bush and there was great celebrating and the alcohol was flowing! One gentleman detained us at length to ask for a Bible – we didn’t have any. We spent a fair amount of time trying to turn the Land Cruiser around in the tiny street with children everywhere.

Ernest pays 1500 Kwacha (\$15) per month for his rental house. I believe it was 3 rooms, though we only saw the front room. We were invited in, he apologized for the smallness of it (our house is a mansion), and we sat at a table that completely filled the room (the room is probably about 8 feet by 8 feet). His wife of 25 years can speak a small amount of English, but his son, Christopher (12 years old), had fantastic English – he is learning in a private school in the village. Ernest said that the government school teachers are always on strike for higher wages. [Throughout the year we heard of the closing of schools for a day here and a day there] Their grandchild was a bit scared of us as he has not seen white people before...it reminded us of the first time Britney saw a black person and cried!

I had noticed that they had light switches and he said that their landlord, who owns 16 houses, had not paid the electric bill on his rentals and Escom had cut off their electricity. Ernest had offered to pay it, but the landlord said he would. So they have not had electricity for 3 months [They still did not have electricity at the end of the year]. He pointed out the landlord’s house nearby. It was a lovely house (surrounded of course by little cement, block huts with metal roofs) with a nice, high wall around it, and does have electricity!

We had a wonderful talk with his family and he told us about their village south of Lilongwe that both he and Florence are from. We plan to take them down there some time to visit their family. His parents have passed away – as is expected as the life expectancy here is about 38 years – but they have 2 older children there. [I later learned that Ernest has a good sized field for raising maize and he or his wife often headed south to work the field during the year]

A painter, who works at the college, dropped by to say hello during our visit with Ernest’s family. He lives nearby, so we stopped there on the way out to take pictures of his family. We also attempted to get pictures of the mice on a stick that they sell. Only for a price we were told!

After arriving I learned that it was important to ask people if you want to take pictures of them. I began to wonder if it was going to be a problem to get video footage of large gatherings as it would be a bit difficult to get permission in those situations. As we spoke with the Counselor for the Chief of the village, a large procession of both young and old passed by singing and playing drums. I asked him quickly if I could video the procession. He ran out to the procession and stopped them so I could begin taking pictures and videos. I stood in the middle of the procession with them playing drums and a cymbal, dancing and singing all around me.

When we approached the Counselor, he was playing a marble game of some sort [Bao – pronounced bow] with three friends (I think something like mancala) They immediately stood, moved the chairs aside and offered me one of them after greeting each one of us...adult and child. It is such a warm culture due in part to this tradition

of greeting every person in the group you meet individually. The kids have really picked things up as they bowed slightly, shook their hands, and held their right elbow with their left hand...all important to show respect.

As we left the village we found Mayi Khosa, a woman we had met on our earlier trip. We had taken a picture of her family and she had asked us to bring the picture back to her. We had a nice short talk with her. She asked for our address in the United States. I asked Ernest why she would want it and he said that they like to have contact with Americans that they may know about Africa. So Connie gave her her parents' address!

### **THINKING**

It has become our goal to work through our thinking on our responsibility to a poverty-stricken country. How can we have an impact on their lives? The dependency on foreigners is so apparent and the culture is supposedly ripe with corruption at all levels. How does an honest Malawian earn a respectable living? How can we help with that, but more importantly, what do they really need? The Lord didn't say that we must have carpet floors, or fans, or windows in our houses. He didn't say that we should have cars. He hasn't said anything I know of about making sure our clothes are without holes!

I am afraid that my first inclination is simply to make their life "American" not better. Pray with us, please. Then, when we figure it out, we can let you know how you need to think about it! Just kidding. Love you all.

Kelly & Connie and kids

## **September 17, 2003**

Dear Friends,

Every now and then we come upon a bit of oasis in this life of change! Every now and then we aren't stretched. I wrote to someone recently that God is going to make me grow up this year, or else!

On the same day that I found out I was assigned to take students to the Kuchere Prison weekly on Thursday afternoons for outreach we spent time at the United States Ambassador's residence in a little party of Americans.

I have never had the desire to be involved in prison ministry, though have considered it a very prudent thing for others to do. They are people who are really down and out and are looking for answers. But, that is just a bit too uncomfortable for me. Add to it the idea that the prison is "over the bridge". I am working on looking forward to the stretch.

### **AN OASIS**

On 9-11 United States residents were invited to the Ambassador's residence for a remembrance program and "get to know the new Ambassador" party. Beautiful place, though not opulent by American standards, rather comfy by Malawian! Steve Browning is very friendly and newer than we are to Malawi. His right hand man, Thomas Dougherty, is from Saratoga, Wyoming. We immediately found him and had a great talk with him about Wyoming and Malawi.

### **FOOD & ECONOMICS**

I also had the opportunity to speak with the Chief Economist for the embassy. He expressed many of the same frustrations with Malawi that most in the West express. They have a huge lake of water and an all year round growing season [if they irrigate], and they grow maize once a year! They have the ability to feed their people easily, but their traditions and culture reject change in their generations old system.

However, in talking with three of Connie's English class students over lunch, there are also economic problems with getting irrigation systems developed. According to Davie, they have some irrigation developed near the lake and are developing more. As he said, "We are developing!"

Mark Dillard (economist) once asked some of the Malawian employees of the Embassy what they did with their money when they take it home. He said they make pretty good incomes by Malawian standards and he was curious. They said that this uncle or that cousin or that brother would come and ask for a bag of maize...by the end of the month, they were borrowing maize as well! Mark calls it a "100% tax on marginal income".

One particular missionary on campus is trying to help their gardener with this by giving him a savings plan in their account...so the worker doesn't take it home. He can save until he has enough for land or new roof, or whatever. However, like most of us, he keeps needing it and would rather borrow on future savings than be disciplined! It's amazing how we spend what we have, eh? [Later we offered to save some of our workers' salary for them and they both jumped at the idea]

We have been amazed by the differences in prices on nearly everything you can buy here. Our first lesson was to purchase things that we would like to have when they are on the shelf as they may disappear and not return again for a long time.

We have been enjoying T-Bone steaks about every two weeks because they are about \$1.75 per pound! Fantastic, fresh tangerines are 5 cents each, a complete cane of sugar (5 ft.) is about 5 cents, a big head of cabbage is 20 cents, flats of strawberries are \$2.50, a big bunch of bananas for 70 cents, and 50 cents for 6 nice tomatoes. Veggies are mostly incredibly cheap.

However, toilet paper is \$2.80 for bag of 6 rolls single ply! Shampoo is \$5 for a small bottle and anything electronic (including keyboards) is at least double United States prices. But, on the other hand, roses are less than \$1 for 10. Connie said she should have fresh roses from me every day!

### **BEING FED**

One of the benefits of being on the ABC campus is the spiritual nourishment. Chapel services are every morning at 7:30 led by Irving, a graduate of ABC Liberia. The teaching and singing is wonderful. There are so many great teachers on campus and we just as frequently hear from the directors of missionary organizations passing through.

In addition, we have staff Bible Study every Wednesday night currently being led by Stephen Spencer, Academic Dean, on the book of Acts. On Fridays we step next door for the potluck dinner and Sunday nights are chapel and then pancakes and waffles, again next door. Every one of these get together are great for fellowship and challenging "one another on to love and good deeds". It is fantastic to be fed so consistently on God's Word.

### **GULE WANKULU**

Robson, our housekeeper, was telling us about an experience he had yesterday. He was looking for a basket to purchase for our bedroom trash in another village near his when he happened upon some Gule Wankulu. They are Chewa Tribe members whose sole purpose is of a quasi-spiritual and cultural nature. They are dressed in wild masks and grass skirts and pass on the Chewa culture by force! How much of the information we receive is just legend is still quite unclear.

When an African comes across a Gule Wankulu, they must pay 5 or 10 Kwacha (5 or 10 cents United States) and get out of there. The other choice is they "catch" you and keep you day and night in their village teaching you the Chewa culture for one month! Since Robson is of Tubuku Tribe from northern Malawi, he had to pay his 5 Kwacha and run!

### **LEADING THE BLIND**

The college has the opportunity for the first time of working with a blind student this year. To be blind in Malawi and go through school is a huge achievement. He is extremely intelligent and I believe with do very well [He did very well]. Pray for both Connie and I that we are able to do him a service in his education! He is learning drums from me and English from Connie! He has a Braille reader from Blantyre (where he is from) that is leading him around and is translating all his textbooks into Braille!

I asked Salimu to come to church with us as he is from Blantyre and does not have a church home here. He said something like, “It is good to give praise to God rather than sit here!” He showed up in the morning and we explained that we had just heard from friends that another friend was being flown to South Africa because she is experiencing some serious nerve problems and had a hard time breathing in the night. Salimu took us to Isaiah 15:22 and asked that I read it and explained that we must trust the God who promises in His word that He is the healer! It was a very quiet, caring, loving nudge to faith from our new friend!

### **WHITE MEN DON’T JUMP OR DANCE**

As Jay Stoms is presenting a course on Old Testament Systematic Theology, he is researching the Chewa religion. He is finding that within the Chewa religion they have an excellent understanding of “original sin”. Maybe because of this, they also have a great distrust of others and gossip is extremely common...personally, I thought it was everywhere!

In addition, students have explained to him that many missionaries rejected dancing as part of worship. I think that that can be attributed to two lines of thought. First, that they believe that it “just ain’t right Biblically” which is certainly contrary to the Biblical record. And, secondly, that in seeing the use of dancing in the pagan worship when they arrived, missionaries thought it was too much baggage for the Africans to handle in their new faith.

Unfortunately, dancing is something that is part of their emotional expression and singing and dancing go together like chewing your food and swallowing – as Jay put it. It is like swallowing without chewing, missing the best part of the experience. I have noticed in my classes that when they sing they look just slightly uncomfortable sitting there. One or two will usually lightly tap on the desks. I finally had three of them take out drums the other day.

Oh, and the faculty got stomped by the students in basketball. I didn’t get to play that much and I think that is why we didn’t beat ‘em!

### **CHICHEWA WORSHIP**

We attended a Chichewa service at an AEC (African Evangelical Church) this morning. After being greeted by one of the elders I was taken into the “vestry”, a little room with benches along the walls and dirty concrete floors. They were having their usual weekly meeting as worship began in the sanctuary. I was introduced by the pastor to all the elders and given their names and backgrounds. Ed Barnes, a professor at ABC, and I sat while they had a “session” meeting.

After 45 minutes we went out to the service. I asked Ed where I should sit and he told me to sit where they wanted me to! Women sit on one side, men on another, and children on short benches near the front. I ended up sitting with the Elders in the front. We were introduced to the church and shortly into the service asked to play a couple songs on my trumpet.

Being the music reader I am, I quickly decided the only songs I knew (memorized) were “Amazing Grace” and “A Mighty Fortress”. I played “Amazing Grace” and then the trouble started. Fortunately, they do not know “A Mighty Fortress” very well and weren’t baffled by my strange choice of notes for the first half of the tune! They were very appreciative anyway and expressed their desire for us to become members of the church!

There were two choirs during the service and though I wanted badly to video tape, I was quite uncomfortable with being a distraction. One of the elders noticed I had the camera and nearly ordered me to video tape! While I sat video taping another elder made note that I wasn’t getting a good picture and told me to stand up!

As it turned out, there didn’t seem to be many people distracted by this white (we were the only whites in the church) guy standing there with a video and I have added some more wonderful footage to my library of African music!

That is quite enough for another two days! Thank you for your prayers...here are some specifics:

1. Working with Richard, our blind student.
2. Prison ministry.
3. Unity among staff / faculty.
4. Students (and us) to “grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ”.

Salani Bwino,  
Kelly & Connie & kids & Milo

“After graduating from ABC, I have a desire to work as a social worker. I may work in any organization that give aids to the needy.” ABC Freshman

*Jay Stoms has some interesting thoughts on the effects of Pre-millennial theology in Africa. Because Pre-millennialism focuses primarily on man’s failure to follow God’s plans for redemption and God’s changes of approach in various epochs because of this failure, this particular theology has the unwanted effect of giving believers little hope for the future other than the entrance to heaven at death or Christ’s return.*

*As an illustration of this, Connie attended a woman’s Bible Study many years ago that had welcomed a guest speaker who had a great deal of involvement in Washington politics. The woman described the horrible things that were happening in D.C. on a number of fronts. Her final word was, “We can just be thankful that the Lord is returning soon!”*

## September 21, 2003

Dear Friends,

Recently we were telling the Spencers (Steve is the Academic Dean) our story of coming to Africa. He suggested that we tell the entire faculty sometime. Most of you know our story so I am not going to retell it, however seeing it from this side of the ocean gives it just a slightly different twist. The lessons learned have deepened with first hand experience.

I recently received two emails from friends that expressed their admiration of our “bravery” in one and “uncanny ability to fit in wherever” in the other. I had to laugh at both and decided that my letters have not fully expressed my incredible Americanism and the comfort seeking life that I have.

As most of you know, the process of determining that God indeed wanted us to leave America for a year took about 2 days last fall [October 2002]. From the first email from Linleigh Roberts to the notice from the Central Wyoming College Human Resources Office a day later noting that I was eligible for a sabbatical, it happened incredibly fast and thoroughly out of my hands.

However, what hasn’t been told is what I learned about myself during that 8 month process. I never have wanted to go to Africa for any reason; vacation, work, play, or whatever. The pictures of a hot, wet (or dry), buggy, snaky, poverty-stricken society has had no pull on me ever!

What it took for God to bring us to Africa, and drag our family along with us, was to give us a highly romanticized picture of what our lives would be like here. We heard frequently that the students were incredible, Malawi is the “warm heart of Africa”, the campus is comfortable, Lilongwe is one of the nicer cities in Africa, and on and on.

Every one of those statements is true (we joke when we are eating t-bones that we are “suffering for the Lord in Malawi”), but they are not the whole picture as you have heard through my updates! In January of this year I was beginning to realize that I had a “romantic” view of this endeavor and began praying specifically that my thinking would become much more realistic that when I arrived I would not sink in despondency!!!

Slowly, I saw it happening beginning with an article and pictures in the National Geographic of all places! It continued with information on the climate and came to full fruition when Stephen and Irene Hodonou showed us pictures of his family's native land of Benin in northern Africa two nights before we left Europe for Malawi.

What is so amazing is the fact that it was gradual and it wasn't complete! No one lied to us, no one gave us bad information (of any real importance), but we didn't really know what we were coming to and I am so very thankful. As we were talking about our story with another family here, it came to me that probably most people have a huge story to tell of God's leading to Africa as most people probably wouldn't come if He didn't make it abundantly clear that that is where He wanted them to go!

For us it is such a testament of God's wisdom and guidance. Thank you for bearing with the unfolding!

By the way, if you have time to read a book, read John Piper's "Don't Waste Your Life".

Love from Lilongwe,  
Kelly and Connie

## September 26, 2003

Hello All,

I sure hope that those of you who don't get a kick out of sitting around reading long windy letters from Africa just hit Control D! I kept thinking that as things moved along, I would have less that I wanted to write about! It doesn't seem to be happening and I am getting a bit self-conscious. I can deal with the guilt, if you can...so on with it.

### **ROAD TRIP!**

We took our first "family trip" – with the able guiding of the Spencer and Chinchon families – out of the Lilongwe area. We headed to Dedza, a village south about an hour and a half on good roads by African standards – a bad state highway in the United States.

Dedza is known for its pottery and pine trees. In the fifties the Brits planted a load of trees on the beautiful hills and they are beautiful mature pines now and are logged by a local outfit.

Dedza Pottery uses the sawdust from the mill for firing and turns out a ton of production and special order pottery. One of the managers took me around to videotape the process and I am certain they enjoyed being in the movies! I am afraid, however, that it will not be anything like my brother's ceramics documentary filmed in Malaysia!

We purchased oodles of pottery for ridiculously low prices, had a lovely lunch (that kept haunting us the rest of the day, if you know what I mean), played football and baseball in their garden, and took a lovely hike in the hills through pines. That was especially significant because it felt just like being in the mountains between Laramie, Wyoming and Ft. Collins, Colorado!

### **BOTTOM HOSPITAL**

It isn't what it sounds like! I found out the morning of taking students to the prison that I was taking students to both it and a hospital in the same area. I decided to keep my own will under raps and ask which group I should actually go in with. They wanted me with the hospital students, so I breathed a sigh of relief, dropped off the prison students and headed to the hospital.

As it turns out, I ended up looking forward to the prison this week! It is very sad. Very grungy. The hospital has Tuberculosis, Aids, maternity and other wards. We visited the "other" wards this time around.

We went to each bed which most often had a child in it with a parent or two and siblings laying on the floor or sitting on the bed with them. Only a couple of the people spoke English so the student I was with spoke mostly with them or I spoke through his translation. We would then pray with them if they wanted us to, which they all did.

A couple children had casts on their legs, none of them because of having had an accident, breaking a leg! In each case, they said they had had sores for several months (usually). I had the impression from the descriptions of the cases that most would probably be treated and healed in the United States in a very short amount of time.

What we have learned here is that treatment is minimal and if you need more than that you are on your way to South Africa and of course most people cannot afford that...so it is long illness or death – get used to it!

Recently we heard a story about a missionary that decided to use a midwife and local hospital to give birth to a child. They had had uneventful births before and decided it would be fine not to go out of country to a nicer hospital to have the baby. It opened up their ministry to the people in the area so much because they showed that they trusted them with their medical needs when all the other missionaries would go away for that kind of treatment.

When I heard that story, I thought it was sad that other missionaries didn't trust God and be "with" the people in this way showing their real willingness to give their lives. Now that I am here, I realize how huge of a step that was for the one missionary family and how reasonable the other missionaries were being! We have found out that the Spencers had two of their children in a similar hospital south of Lilongwe! After seeing "Bottom Hospital" I greatly admire them!

### **TUTSIS & HUTUS**

Today in chapel our guest speaker was the International Director of *Action Ministries*. This very humble man told an incredible story of his experience in Rwanda in 1994 when the Tutsis and Hutus were fighting.

There were a million refugees that showed up in a town of 50,000. As it was the wet season and the only toilet facilities were "natural", the run-off ended up in the lake nearby where the people got their drinking water. As a result thousands were getting cholera and 50,000 people died in three days!

The speaker had come to help with the medical missionaries as the Dutch medical folks and the French army were leaving because of the violence. The mission paid a group of men to carry those who were sick to the make-shift medical facilities to be treated. They were paid for 2 weeks of work and after 3 days the men came to ask for more money. The speaker told them they had no more money and the men were very angry.

He explained that he is a coward and that he was very scared in the midst of this anger and violence and had no idea what to do. He finally got an interpreter and began speaking with the men telling them he had no more money and he had paid them for two weeks of work. They got angrier still. He then explained that he understood their anger, that he had never been in their position of losing their homes and family and that he had only had cancer!

The interpreter turned to him and began asking about his cancer. "Do you still have cancer?" Yes. "Was your doctor upset that you came to our country?" Yes. "What if you die?" Bury me in that field (pointing). "You wish to be buried here?" Yes, but hopefully I won't die!

The interpreter then told him that he would speak for him. He began to explain to his people that this man was willing to die for them and that he was going to help his people! The other men turned completely around, some coming up and crying, holding our speaker's legs.

A clear object lesson in what God has said:

Romans 5:8 - *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (NKJ)*

John 15:12-13 - *This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. (NKJ)*

I need to remember this story the next time we are enjoying burgers and fries in our lovely, African home!

Tsalani bwino (have a great day),  
Kelly

## October 8, 2003

Muli Bwanji,

The Chichewa lessons are coming along...nothing formal, mind you, but our gardener, housekeeper, music assistants and various guards in various locations have gotten used to expanding our knowledge.

There is a certain hesitancy in greeting "azungus" here possibly as a vestige of colonial African days. As they have gotten used to Connie and I greeting them, they have become more comfortable (I think) in challenging our language skills by nearly always adding a little statement on to their greeting. I have learned to not say, "I don't understand", but instead say, "Say it again". Then I make my best attempt which usually misses the mark!

### **BANANA HARVEST (Connie's pen)**

I wanted to write to you to tell you about the felling of the banana tree. Robson (our housekeeper) told us that the bananas were beginning to ripen and Mr. Nanjala (gardener) was going to cut them. So they waited for us to come and Kelly and I got our cameras and met them at the ntochi. (You have to say that right or instead of saying "banana tree" you say something else, but don't ask me the right or the wrong way because I couldn't really hear a difference in the inflection).

On the way out the door, Robson grabbed my serrated bread knife. I wondered if the machete wouldn't work better. I also wondered if they needed a ladder because they hang pretty high and neither Robson nor Mr. Nanjala are tall (Malawians are short and petite on average).

We got all set and N puts the knife, MY BREAD KNIFE, to the trunk of the banana tree!!!! They cut the whole puppy down! He showed us all the young banana trees coming up around this one (probably so we wouldn't cry - he knows how attached I've been to my ntochi)! I guess they only have the one big bunch, then they die. It was really a surprise.

The banana that ripened on the tree was good. But the birds had gotten to it, which is why you have to cut your bananas while they're still green. You can pass that on to your neighbors! :) It was a little orangish in the middle, not just whitish, yellow. Yum, it WAS better than the ones picked green. At least that's my story and I'm sticking to it!!

### **MINI MAN**

This morning I got up and went to get my ice water and there's "Mini Man" or someone who looks just like Mini Man in my sink. (The kids have named the geckos!) He was just a tiny little guy and he couldn't get out of the slippery, stainless steel sink. So I gathered my wits about me and helped the little fellow out.

He ran to the tile on the wall behind the sink and tried to go up but alas, he had lost his "sticky" or something because he couldn't go up. I thought that maybe those were too slippery too, but usually they wouldn't have a

problem with it. A guy that makes his living crawling around on the walls can't be too particular and what difference would slippery make when you are vertical or upside down, I ask you?

So anyway, I didn't want to give up on him so I took him to the wall. He couldn't do it. Three of his feet seemed to be able to stick on there but that front left one just wouldn't stick (I asked Robson about it later and he said maybe he was just tired). I hope so. I put him down and he ran behind the fridge. Brit says he keeps a pot of sticky back there!

### **HOW TO HELP?**

As I was leaving English class, a student stopped me. I had written some questions on his paper and I wasn't surprised to see him. I thought he would explain his answers. Instead he explained that his dad had passed away awhile back and his uncle had been telling him and telling him to come to ABC. His uncle had been telling him that he would pay for him if he could get in.

So he went through the process of taking the test (they only let certain ones with certain test scores even take the test) and was granted an interview. He passed the interview and was accepted.

My student's name is Gift. He went to his uncle whose situation or mind has changed and now can't assist in his finances. Gift thinks that he can't come to ABC. Then he receives some inheritance...K13,000! This is less than \$130. I think school is \$400 per semester. He was worried about what to do. I prayed with him.

I'm sure he knows that I could take care of his problem....There are so many here in this same situation. It is so hard to know what to do. I look in this young man's face and I want to go hand him this money. If I give him money for this year, I'm making a commitment for all his years here. This man could make a huge impact on this small country of Malawi and maybe even on this large continent of Africa. ABC graduates are all over in important positions making a difference here.

But, so many of these students are in his shoes. Who to help? How to help? Kelly and I don't want to encourage a society of dependence. There are so many charities here and yes, they need help, but they need help to help themselves. But on the other hand, these students, if allowed to stay and study might do just that. But on the other hand, how do I know which student or students are the ones that I should "invest" in on a larger scale? There are so many questions.

Then the 3 chapel speakers this morning were ABC graduates who had gone to the United States for the summer as interns. One said it was funny to be a missionary to the United States! :) They were shocked (like we were coming here). They were surprised at the children, "having everything" they kept saying. But so many were from broken homes and so many were so empty.

Kelly and I were discussing this morning on our walk how kids in America have so much disposable income. I said that I'd like to challenge the youth group at church to send their snack money for a week here and feed a family like my gardener's. We found out yesterday that they don't have a table or chair or beds. He and his wife have a cushion to sleep on and their 2 daughters sleep on sacks...I hope there's something in the sacks, but I don't know. I want to go buy them cushions.....but should I help them learn to save money and spend wisely instead? Or as well?

Or when I'm gone, what have I done if I just give, give? Jesus said that the poor you will always have with you, but he also says that when we clothe someone who is naked or feed someone who is hungry, we've done it for Him. Anyway...we'll pray...you can pray with and for us. It's good for us. We decided that all people should do a trip to the "other side". I know when we went to Mexico it opened our eyes to all we have. It's good.

### **A WILD RIDE (KD once again)**

I have to pass on this little story. A missionary who is in Malawi short term (just a couple months) was telling us his experience last week:

He was hit by someone while in his car. He stopped to talk to the person, but they took off. He decided to chase them. He followed them to the Central Market (it is considered very dangerous to go there at night, especially by yourself). They ended up stopped and got out of their cars. He began talking to him and noticed a hand reach into his front seat and take out his cell phone. He thought that, "they could at least ask if they wanted to use it!" Then he realized the guy was stealing it. So, he took off after him on foot.

He was yelling "thief" the whole time and soon a number of others had joined in the race. Then he realized that his car was sitting back in the market, still running! He headed back and it was fortunately still there. He again began talking with the other driver and noticed something in his back pocket. His wallet had a string attached to his waste and soon he felt a tug and the string broke!

Again, he set off running to catch another thief! Again, he did not catch him and returned to the vehicle. An "investigator" showed up and soon another man (who appeared to be beaten) showed up that they said was his assailant. He was taken to the police station (in his car) and upon arrival noticed a man get out of his back seat that he hadn't even noticed before! He didn't know what he was doing there and never did find out.

He signed papers and was on his way. I sat there marveling at the story saying to myself, "What were you thinking?! He certainly rushed in where angels fear to tread!"

### **PRAYER REQUESTS**

1. Praise that I have heard from three people in the United States that are donating good instruments to ABC – two saxophones (needed very badly) and a cornet. Pray for the transport of them to ABC.
2. For us to use our time effectively. Quite frankly, we hope that we develop that skill not just for our year here!
3. Wisdom regarding classes for second semester. Connie will need to make a decision about continuing in English and I have the possibility of additional theology and music courses.
4. For ABC as it makes major decisions regarding grant funding of AIDS work the clinic is doing.
5. Learning Chichewa.

Zikomo kwambili (thank you very much,  
Kelly

## **October 22, 2003**

Ana ali bwanji (how is your family)?

It is warming up in Malawi. It has been in the nineties lately though continuing to be dry at this point. We headed to the Lake for the first time last weekend. The Jansons (the doctor on campus) got reservations for us at the Livingstonian Hotel near Salima on the lake. It was a long weekend as Monday is "Mothers' Day" in Malawi! Connie sure is getting special treatment this year with two days!

It is about 1.5 hours away and we took a student home to Salima as well. They don't get home much even being close as it costs too much to take the bus - \$3. We spent some time with his father (uncle) and mother (aunt) and his sister when we retrieved him coming back. Both parents had died when he was young. They are so incredibly hospitable. They had their kondi (porch / veranda) furniture all covered with lacy cloth and served cokes to all of us. [We found out over time that everyone's tiny homes are furnished this way if they have furniture at all]

He had gone to the market the day before to "research" the prices of items that we hoped to purchase when we were returning. The prices quoted for Azungu (whites) is quite different than for the Africans and he wanted to find out the difference for us so we could barter. As it turned out, the items we purchased were quoted at least 4 times as much than the "discount" price.

Frackson (the student) was quite disgusted and let the vendors know that it is completely unfair, that we are all people created equal before God. They didn't take kindly to his criticism and let him know. While we were shopping, they harangued him for ruining their business!

It provided good discussion for our trip home, considering whether indeed it was unfair and wrong for them to charge two different prices. I explained that as his father, who is a college teacher, makes 20,000 K (\$200) per month, and I am a college teacher making a whole lot more than that, I am able to afford much more than he can. We didn't quite get the whole issue settled, but made a little headway in our thinking!

### **KACHERE PRISON**

Last week, while sitting in the courtyard of the Kachere Prison, I thought it was about time to pay more attention to the details of the place! The ABC students I take there were leading a group discussion with about 10 prisoners in Chichewa, therefore eradicating my involvement, no matter how smart I think I am speaking a greeting to every African I meet.

The prison is located on an alley by the Central Market (the place that strikes fear in our hearts). You enter by an old steel pipe gate and park in a little area that I find almost impossible to turn around in when leaving! The road and driveway are a mix of torn up tarmac and dirt.

The guards are very friendly and seem to be quite happy that we are there. We enter the brick building – of course every building is made out of bricks here – by a steel door into a small room with a guest book. From there they open another door into the courtyard.

The courtyard is a cement hot house! I kept saying to the students that it was “warm” as I know that it isn't “hot” yet here! That comes in about 3 weeks. The thing I notice first is the prisoners taking their baths. They fill a 40 gallon plastic trash can with water from a tap along the wall, take it to a cement wash basin about 6 feet wide and a couple feet deep, and then take a sponge bath. Yes, it is a bit distracting while you are discussing Romans or Ephesians!

Their rooms are simply part of the wall of the prison surrounding the courtyard. I believe they are about 15 feet by 15 feet and they sleep on the ground – concrete – on mats. I noticed on the wall today that “room and board” for “convicted” prisoners is K60 a night (60 cents). I would say that that is about the right price!

Near a step there was smoke rising from a small fire built by a prisoner to cook some food. I am not sure if the prisoners have the option of having their food delivered.

Several prisoners come over to greet us quite joyfully and they begin clapping and singing. The system for finishing a song is the leader from the college says, “Hallelujah” and everyone responds, “Amen”.

Today we moved into a corner room – which the prisoners quickly swept out with their little straw sweepers – before they let us into the room. The room was much more bearable than the courtyard. They also sought out a little wood bench for the leader to sit on and a piece of cardboard for other “honored guests” to sit on.

Today, as I sat pondering the prison, not understanding a word they said, I realized that I am becoming quite a lot more comfortable in these bleak surroundings...I don't quite want a life of crime! At least not in Malawi!

### **FANCY NIGHT OUT**

We finally ventured out at night to somewhere other than the heavily guarded Ambassador's residence. We asked the Director (Chinchen) and the Academic Dean (Spencer) and wives out to dinner as long as they drove and picked the restaurant. We went to one of the “fancy” places in Lilongwe – Koreana. It is a Korean restaurant in downtown New City.

Like everything we have seen here, there is no such thing as even 3 Star! We thoroughly enjoyed the meal and time with the Chinchens and Spencers, but it ain't America! There was a rather stinky mosquito rejection device right by our table and Paul asked the waiter to turn off the fluorescent lights!

But, having been here two months, we felt like we were in the lap of luxury!

### **SPEAKING OF LUXURY**

It is so strange to be in such a “service” society. Everything is done by hand and therefore manual labor is in every area of life. From our house help to the employment of caddies at the golf course to my students or assistants at the college carrying my bags or horns...they manually serve in every part of the society.

We struggled so much with the apparent leftovers of “colonialism” when we arrived, but have since realized more and more that instead of handouts to those who refuse to work, putting people to work is indeed one of the best ways to help them. We have shared our struggles with how to help financially and are working through these issues.

Though we have the ability here to support students or others easily, we are learning more and more that it is not helping them. We are now thinking through ways to employ students including the braiding of Janelle’s hair – which takes 10 hours! After paying them \$15 total (for all those hours), the student asked if we were “broke” – she really felt bad that we were paying her so much!

### **SPEAKING OF POLITICS**

Recently, Connie had a discussion with a student in her class named Geoffrey. As are many of the students, Geoffrey is a bit older and already married. Many are teachers continuing to be on the state payroll, but going back to school to extend their education, which was quite minimal in the first place – basically 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

Anyway, Geoffrey came to Connie to discuss a grade on his paper. Connie gave him a “C” because she couldn’t read his writing. ABC has a new computer lab, but most students have never used a computer when they arrive, so it is a couple years before they have classes and are allowed to use them at will! They take typing (on electric typewriters – which are very rare in Malawi) during their freshman year.

She told him she couldn’t read his writing and he said, “So I have punished myself!” How many teachers in the United States hear that from students? He asked if he could just read it to her. She said that would be fine, but wouldn’t help his grade!

She decided later, after he had read it to her, that she would give him a “B” because it was certainly worth an “A” in the level of writing (just not penmanship). She walked by the men’s hostels (dorms) and yelled at Geoffrey (females can’t go in). She said that she was giving him a “B”. From another part of the hostel she heard another student yell, “Corruption!”

### **MALAWI POLITICS**

Which brings us to Malawi politics! We have the wonderful opportunity to be here during the third only national elections! Some would say that they would prefer not to be, but we will simply pray that things remain calm!

The first President, Banda, was President for 30 years from the early 60s when Malawi gained independence from Britain to the early nineties when they had their first elections. He was in essence a dictator with vision! He ruled with an iron fist, yet as a result, things ran rather smoothly and the education system and infrastructure developed to a certain extent. Malawi had been left by Britain with national highway system or economic development.

Stories are told that Banda would announce on radio that if you didn’t like Malawi then you need to get out and his “brute” squads would show up at doorsteps to either beat (Malawians) or escort (Foreigners) out of the country if they were dissident! I of course, being political, used “dissidents” to explain “dissonance” in music the other day. Just a bit of contextualizing!

He retired and a Muslim President was elected. Most of these things changed including the addition of a supposedly free press and speech, however corruption is rife and the infrastructure has not developed. There is a large billboard near the college that has his picture and "Reject Corruption, Report Corruption" and some other word...I can't remember! Of course, most everyone laughs at it!

He has served two terms – the new Constitution's limit – and has been asking the legislature to change it to extend his rule. However, they have rejected his proposals so as far as we know, elections will be held in May.

I asked the students the other day if they intended to vote. According to one student the percentage of those voting in the last election went down as they saw that things were not improved by a new President. I consider it my "calling" during the next several months to spend a bit of time encouraging their concept of democracy!

### **LITTLE DITTIES**

Regarding the Tooth Fairy: Linda (from Uganda) says she was told by her parents to put her tooth under her pillow and a rat would come to get it and leave money. Fiskiani (from Malawi) says Malawians throw the tooth on the roof so that the crows will come get it. If they don't, the tooth will not grow back! They were very careful to not lose their tooth when it came out!

Aufwiedersehen,  
Kelly

## **October 31, 2003**

Dear Friends,

We took the kids to dinner at 7-Eleven a few nights ago! Actually to Cafe Delight! It is owned by Lebanese folks. It is a pizza joint with pretty nice decor. Large pizzas are \$7 (they aren't very large) and are quite good. We also had beef spring rolls - really good! The cute little 300 ml pop bottles (what we buy all our pop in) are 30 cents. It has been nice to eat out for a reasonable price!

### **DENTISTRY IN THE THIRD WORLD**

I had a front tooth filled a bit - I had chipped it right after we got here eating popcorn! So, while I was at it and getting Joel checked for Malaria (doesn't have), I took video of the dentist and the clinic.

He was here for two weeks to see faculty, students and locals. They had him nicely set up at the clinic and he was unbelievably fast. It took him about 15 minutes. He said that he was doing things that he hadn't done since medical school! Those things are always done by the Dental Assistants, you know!

### **NEW TRANSPORTATION**

Our gardener, who has never asked for anything (which is quite rare), asked to "borrow" \$45 to buy a new bike. He wanted us to deduct it from his pay. That is so he doesn't have to walk here (5 km or so) everyday. He wants us to deduct \$5 from his pay each month out of \$45! Connie gave him the \$45 and he and Robson headed to the Central Market to a shop that Robson has dealt with.

They talked them down from \$57 to \$45 for a new bike. It needs some work as they just throw them together and they need lots of adjustment. So we forked out another \$2.50 for that! Highway robbery! When they left, people outside saw the nice new bike and were saying, "An Indian must have died!" Meaning they must have taken the shop owner - it is in Indian Town!

### **CHRISTIANS IN POLITICS**

Had a good talk in passing with Saidi (the student that guided us on our orientation trip back in the first weeks of being here) tonight. We talked about the need for Christians with integrity and lacking corruption to be involved in government. The distrust of the government is extensive and many Christians do not get involved

because they don't want to get sucked in or be castigated by the others in government who don't like being told they are out of line.

Someone just told us that the sale of a large load of maize to Zimbabwe (or some other country nearby) sometime back by Malawi was put together by the President who has interest in a trucking firm. Malawi then bought the maize back from the country...double work for the trucks!

The headlines seem to be more often dealing with the International Monetary Fund and other governments who are or aren't going to give aid to Malawi. They are so dependent on everyone else that many of the decisions for Malawi are really made externally.

### **SNAKES, SNAKES!**

The Africans are rather used to snakes and it is a good thing! With the warmer weather the ground is warming up and when the ground warms up, out come the snakes. There have been quite a number of snakes that have met their end in the past week. Every now and then we hear a commotion between classes and run out to see the gate guard with one run through with a stick or something long and pointed!

One student told us that the Malawians often think that snakes can come back to life from the dead. The belief probably comes from the fact that they seem to live on quite sometime after being decapitated or clearly destroyed. One that was being held by a guard with a stick in its head suddenly curled up around the stick. Connie had to reassure a student that, "Snakes do NOT come back to life!"

### **TABLE TALK**

Geoffrey Mbewa (freshman) was part of a group of four students eating lunch at our house yesterday. He explained he had had ice cream only once – when he came to ABC this year. While he was enjoying ice cream for dessert after lunch Connie noticed his bus heading out of campus for outreach. Connie asked if he was going to miss the bus. He replied while shoveling ice cream in his mouth, "No, I am running for the bus right now!"

One student who earlier in the semester wrote that there was quite a lot of discussion among students that "azungus" were eating the African food in the cafeteria with them (the Dehnert crew descended upon them), was among the students eating lunch with us. Matson noted that he wished he had a picture of all of us at lunch as people would be very surprised to see him eating with whites.

We have more than once (including yesterday) been told by students that when we bring cookies to class or when they eat at our house that it is like Christmas. The variety of foods and tastes is unbelievable to them.

### **JANELLE'S HAIRDO**

Reactions to Janelle's braided hair (it took 10 hours): David Spencer (15 years old) asked his dad when he saw her walking by, "Who was that little girl with the big hair?"

When she came to school in her uniform and braids, her teacher called her, "Time for School Barbie!"

Mr. Linsz, Headmaster of the kids' school, is quite taken with her and calls her "Shaniqua". Of course I call Britney and Janelle my little African girls now.

### **INTERESTING QUOTES**

The van I usually drive for outreach on Thursdays was run into a tree a few days ago. Larry Brown the Director of Outreach came by to say there was another car to use, but the van was drivable according to Moses, our mechanic. Take a look at the picture attached.

Students in Connie's English class said that, "There are no Negroes in Africa. Negroes are American blacks," though they wouldn't want to be called that.

A couple folks, including a faculty member were called “fat” in Chapel the other day. In talking to the students, they said that is not offensive at all and in fact it is somewhat complimentary here!

With Thanksgiving,  
The Dehnerts

## **November 7, 2003**

Dear Friends,

This note is to specific people that I thought would have the most interest in thinking through and about culture from a Biblical perspective.

### **WORSHIP IN MALAWI**

We were invited to a different church today by a couple students of ours. Though we have somewhat picked a “church home” here, we have planned since we arrived to spend many Sundays while here visiting a variety of churches.

We have found that the Malawian churches are very honored to have Azungus (whites) attend their services. They just absolutely gush forth with praise and appreciation for us coming! The pastor mentioned me in his sermon, I was asked to pray for the benediction, and of course many had a hard time keeping their eyes off us! I was half expecting to be asked to play or sing or dance!

This particular church service was being held in a classroom at the University of Malawi Nursing College. Sounds nice, but is the normal basic construction and limited facilities of most government buildings here. It is part of a very new denomination called “Presbyterian Church Malawi”. It split from the “Church of Central Africa Presbyterian” because the CCAP was tending towards liberal in its view of scripture including the belief that we are saved by water baptism. In addition, the PCM is charismatic.

I want to primarily present some specific things they did in worship that greatly challenged me – and distracted me!

Every church we have been to here has had a time of introducing visitors. As a visitor you are asked to stand up while you either introduce yourself or are introduced by the person who brought you. I began to introduce the family today, but our student wanted very much to introduce us.

I had heard that the CCAP plays hardball when it comes to the offering including calling the various areas of Lilongwe down to the front to give their tithe. The quotes today in the PCM were:

“Some people in humility hold their money very tight [in the fist] until it is worthless!”

“You hold your money so tight it turns into toilet paper!”

“I want to break with tradition today. Give your offering to the person next to you. Tell them to give it to the Lord for you.”

Then, those who were to give that day marched up front to put it in the basket. As the only Azungus in the entire church today, it was rather intimidating. Primarily because we understand that if you are white, you are rich!

The CCAP does not sing many “choruses” in their service. They normally stick with western hymns either in English or Chichewa. This service included only choruses or the “chorus” from a hymn accompanied by drums, piano, and bass.

We realized that the lack of hymn use (or songs with lots of lyrics) in most Malawian churches can be attributed to the lack of song books...they can't afford them. Therefore, it is problematic to remember all those words! One particular chorus included a repetition of spelling "Jesus" with body signs of the letters by all of us.

At one point in the service we sang one of my favorite Malawian choruses and while the band continued to play, nearly everyone began to pray out loud. We recently had a group from the United States come over on a short term mission trip. One of the pastors had our entire chapel pray at the same time. It created a great deal of discussion among the faculty. I am curious as to the application of 1 Corinthians 14. Look it up and let me know!

The Pastor gave an extensive sermon – about an hour in a service that lasted from 9:30 to 12:30. He spent at least 90% of time "yelling". Britney said afterwards that she thought she had permanent hearing loss. We have noticed a great deal of "passionate" preaching here. The family discussed it afterwards and we had varying perspectives including:

"Gets your attention!"

"Shows that he really believes it!"

"Does he think HE is the one that is going to change the people?"

So, there you have it. Chew on it...

With Thanksgiving,  
The Dehnerts

## **November 16, 2003**

Hello All,

### **DEATH AND DYING**

When we arrived at ABC we were told a number of things to be wary of when dealing with the students and various workers on campus. One of the common problems is the Malawian funeral. They warned us that we would be frequently asked to excuse either workers or students to attend them and it was important to have some guidelines.

For a few weeks we were not really all that privy to this problem. It didn't seem to be happening. These past couple weeks have changed things.

While returning from helping transport one of my music assistants (Ernest) to finalize the paperwork on purchasing a lot to build a house, we discussed the woman he was buying the lot from. He explained to me that she had lost 2 daughters and 1 son in law in the past year. She, a son, and a daughter were raising 5 grandchildren. Ernest said it was likely they had died of AIDS.

Connie has learned from assigned papers that nearly every member of the Freshman class is an orphan, from a single parent family, and/or has lost siblings.

Two of my students missed class last week to attend separate funerals.

John, an upperclassman, went home a couple weeks ago because his father had died in South Africa while being treated for heart attack, diabetes and who knows what else. Just a couple days ago his uncle died as well, the one his father was caring for.

Chisomo spent a few years in the UK while her father finished his masters or doctorate as a member of the Ministry of Forestry in Malawi. Connie asked about him and she explained that he died a couple years ago.

Robson, our housekeeper, and I went to pick up his “grandfather” to take him to the clinic as he had lost both legs and one of the amputated legs was hurting. He explained on the way that he is actually his great uncle. His grandfather, who would be in his 60s, died sometime ago in a plane crash in South Africa.

While being careful not to talk about things too sensitive, Connie was asking one student about his children (intentionally not asking the student next to him as we knew she had lost 2 children recently). He explained that he had two, but had lost one.

I was waxing eloquent about AIDS, its effects, and the sadness of families who lost young people to a student at the cafeteria a week ago. I then proceeded to ask about his family. His father had died in the 80s – probably was in his 40s – and his mother had just died recently. He had 4 siblings and 1 had died as well.

Connie noted in Women’s Bible Study that they are “dropping like flies” and immediately realized that an “azungu” in the group had just lost a baby in her orphanage / nursery.

Everyone is affected. Everyone knows someone intimately. We hear story after story of expatriates providing the transportation of bodies to funerals and far away villages for their families. I am waiting for that day!

### **KAMUZU ACADEMY**

In 1981, Kamuzu Academy was opened by Malawi’s former President, Dr. Banda. It was intended by the “Most honored and Life President, Kamuzu Banda” to be the best of the best of education for the two best students from every district in grades 8 through sophomore in college.

We traveled the two hours this weekend to watch our various sports teams match up with their older teams – basketball, netball, volleyball, and soccer. It was fascinating being the only 4 whites around for most the time! If you like attention, this is the place to be.

It is quite an amazing place, though has taken backward steps following the resignation and death of Banda in the early 90s. A lovely auditorium, really nice dining hall, a green (very green) campus (I thought ABC was green), and excellent sports facilities. Such a strange place in the midst of Malawi!

Banda received his education in England and hired primarily English faculty, but since funding has dropped – it was once nearly a 1/3 of the Ministry of Education’s budget – they will accept anyone who has \$15,000 to spend each year.

### **GEOFFREY & SENATOR**

I wrote about Geoffrey last week – the student whose wife was unable to come to visit last week. Since he lives near Kamuzu Academy, we decided to take him home and get his wife to bring to ABC this weekend. In the process of planning another student of ours asked to come along to see his wife and children in the general vicinity.

They are two of the nicest students we have and we thoroughly enjoyed the trip up to Kasungu with them filling us full of cultural information. Both are teachers and both have wives that teach. As is the custom in Malawi, they live in homes provided on the campuses of their primary or secondary schools.

Geoffrey’s wife was expecting him as he had sent a note with a friend who had brought word midweek that his wife, Joyce, was fine. He gave her a nice hug and we went about the usual Malawi hospitality dance – not literal. They sat us in their 6’ by 10’ living room / dining room and we talked with them and any other folks who are just visiting are there because they heard azungus were coming.

Their kitchen was out back in a little brick hut with a thatch roof. Not only does it save space in the house, it doesn’t heat up the house and it is less likely that the house burn down when cooking (Senator’s house on the other hand burned a couple years ago). There is a nice big pile of wood in the corner of the yard – normally the

women and children do the gathering of wood. However, Geoffrey told us of the time that his mother in law criticized him for cutting the firewood because that was “woman’s work”.

The bufa (bath) was in a second room of the kitchen hut. Geoffrey’s family has water only 100 meters from their house, unlike Senator’s (1 kilometer). They bring it in big pales and heat it somewhat for their “sponge” baths.

The graveyard was in the trees – as is the custom – near their property border. People are not allowed to cut down the trees around the graves according to Senator.

The toilet was an outhouse near the edge of the property and consists entirely of a whole in the ground. When we returned to campus, Geoffrey’s 5 year old son came excitedly to his father after going into the dorm bathroom. “What is that,” he asked. Geoffrey told him it was a toilet. Joseph asked how you get up on that thing. Geoffrey told him you sit on it. “Can I use it,” Joseph asked. Geoffrey assured him that would be fine. We had a good laugh listening to Geoffrey recount the whole incident!

Unlike many men in Malawi, both Senator and Geoffrey do “women’s” work at home. Senator explained to me that normally they arise at 5 am and the whole family works in the garden for awhile. Then they go inside and either he or his wife fix breakfast, starting two fires. One fire is for the food and one for the water for “baths”.

The other one sweeps out the house. You see Malawians sweeping walks, houses, streets, everywhere all the time. We have noted that the smoother the concrete the better for Malawians. I think it could be to sweep more easily! Senator then bathes the children which is unusual for men. Then they are out the door for school at 7 am.

### **DEPUTIZING**

On the way to Kasungu we came across a road block. It is very normal...in fact we have one almost all the time just outside campus. Police are dropped off at those “check points” in the morning and retrieved in the evening.

Often times we are not stopped, but periodically they will wave for us to stop. We normally greet them in Chechewa and it tends to lighten them a bit! Sometimes they ask for a license and sometimes to see the reflectors that we are required to carry in our vehicles at all times.

At this particular stop the policeman asked for a ride! He needed to catch up to a truck that they had let past and wanted to check its katundu (stuff). So, we of course let him jump in and we took a few minutes overtaking the truck, the policeman waving his hand up and down (telling him to stop), and slowed down in front of him. The trucker pulled his truck to the side of the road and we dropped the policeman off and we were on our way! I suppose he hitched another ride back to the check point.

### **CHRISTMAS DINNER AT NANDOS**

Arriving back in Lilongwe, we decided to take Geoffrey and his family and Senator out to dinner at Nandos. Nandos is a very good “fast food” restaurant that mostly serves chicken items (burgers and wraps) and chips (French fries). It is a bit cheaper than going out to McDonalds in the United States.

While we were eating, both Senator and Geoffrey noted that they had never been to such a nice restaurant! They absolutely gushed forth their appreciation for making their day so very special! We just sat there stunned. The soccer team was promised a lunch there for winning the game at Kamuzu Academy. Connie asked the same question, and several noted they had never been to a “nice” place like that either.

Tsalani bwino,  
The Dehnerts

**December 8, 2003**

Howdy to You All,

Having just finished off Thanksgiving, can't help but think of home! We enjoyed a wonderful Malawian meal of rice, beef in sauce, chicken in sauce, greens in ground nuts, salad and jelly (jello) and butterscotch pudding at Lotan and Theresa's home.

Lotan and Theresa both are graduates of ABC and are now working for the college, Lotan as Sports Director and Theresa with the clinic. They both grew up in Malawi but in quite different families. Theresa has an American, British, Malawian mix of accent as her friends were of that mix growing up. Lotan is the tallest Malawian we have ever seen at 6 foot 5 inches, a foot taller than most all of the rest!

They are the first Malawians to invite us to their home for a meal. It was very interesting to be in the home of a somewhat middle class Malawian family. The home would be smaller than many in poverty in the United States, but very nicely kept. They have a couple "extra" kids because of the death or inability of relatives to take care of their kids. Connie and I were trying to remember what family we have visited that didn't have "extra" kids.

Their house has a wall and gate just like most of the homes that have anything to protect. It has a "house boy" hut in the back yard. The British generally built a little house for their employees in the backyard. When ABC was built they considered it too "colonial" and did not add those construction projects. As time went along they found themselves being criticized by the Malawians who considered it a great service to have housing provided in addition to being somewhat part of the family.

However, the former would be greatly dependent on the family's willingness to include them in the family – most (including us) have a very difficult time knowing where the line between employer and employee runs.

### **SEX & FAMILY IN MALAWI**

First of all, a Malawian better not see that title! Sex is not talked about at all, you do not ask about someone's pregnancy or if they are, and of course all the ladies are carefully covered with clothes.

However, we are finding that it is a smoke screen for many people as some groups practice everything from polygamy to child rape as a matter of course. Though it is dying out, at least one tribe has initiation rites for girls that include sending them to the bush with the tribal chief or other males in authority to be "taught". Virginity is something to be lost early on, not a positive! Sometimes it is the "duty" of the male relatives to take care of that.

In addition, male headship in homes means that he is the "king of the castle" as my children call me – however, they mean that he is a ruthless dictator. Janet Brown, a faculty member of ABC, has students ask on a regular basis in her ethics course when it is appropriate to beat your wife!

Connie and I are hoping to teach a Marriage class second semester. We are trying to get a good handle on their cultural norms and we want to make sure we don't just teach it from an American perspective, but Biblical. Fortunately for us, Malawians mostly respect what azungus say, but that also places a great deal of pressure on us to guard our tongues. Lotan told us of a Malawian saying, "Mlendo amadza ndi kalumo ka kakunthwa". It means visitors bring w/ them a sharp knife or a foreigner brings the necessary utensil to open up the food for eating! He explained that people would take advice from us better than from them.

### **FIRST CONCERT**

A week before Thanksgiving the ABC Beginner and Advanced Bands performed their first concert for the year. It went well, was well received, and the students had a blast – in some cases literally! The Advanced Band has been very inconsistent in rehearsal and I hope to have fixed that with a little discussion.

In addition to the bands performing, the first ever ABC Jazz Combo performed. It is a group (vocal, guitar, bass, piano, and me) that I put together to accompany the choir in their Christmas program. As we met to rehearse for that we began to spend a bit of time “jamming” on some jazz tunes.

I was quite amazed by their skills despite not really having a clue what they were doing. What I have found is that most of the musicians, those who actually have spent a fair amount of time learning keyboard or guitar, do a lot of performing – weekly in church! It is a culture of improvisation because they don’t read music, so they have the ear and a lot of skill, just not the reading ability.

So, after being quite excited by their jazz skill, I started rehearsing them to specifically perform on their own. They were last on the program, performed “Blue Bossa” and “Amazing Grace” and brought the house down! There are two fantastic vocalists that have sat in with us and so are taking advantage of that. The combo also performed for Capital City Baptist Church’s Christmas program that weekend.

### **BREAKING AND ENTERING**

The campus had its first real excitement this week. Fortunately it wasn’t serious, unfortunately it had to do with the Dehnerts. Sunday evening, following a Christmas service in a local church, Connie and the kids went home. They had locked themselves out when leaving.

The only way Connie could get in, she thought, was by bashing a small window pane on the kondi door. She proceeded to use a brick. Soon she heard the tell tale signs of emergency – a rather obnoxious alarm that all the houses have. She didn’t think we had any kind of wiring to actually set off alarms so thought is must just be one of the other houses.

All of a sudden there was a gun shot and so she got the kids inside, a little concerned for their safety. Soon after that the Team Security guys were surrounding the area in their riot gear.

As it turned out, Paul Chinchon, next door, had thought someone was breaking one of their windows and his wife pushed their emergency button and he headed outside with his gun to scare them away! Following this revelation, Judy Barnes called, asking rather innocently, if Connie got in alright!

By God’s Grace Alone,  
Kelly & Connie

## **December 15, 2003**

Hello Dear Friends,

### **NGUMBI**

Tis the season...for ngumbi! That is not short for Christmas, mind you. The ngumbi are the full grown termites that begin flying out of their holes and in a short time (hours or a very few days maybe, I am not sure) they lose their wings and fall to the ground. We stood outside in the midst (mist) of them as they poured out of little holes by our driveway.

It is at this point that everyone is catching and eating them! Their wings are all over the place, just piling up. It is slightly disgusting having them all over the classroom! We finally tried some compliments of Dan Linsz, the kids’ Principal. He had them fried up and as the youth group was caroling on campus he offered them. He then gave me the whole container to take to Connie to try! Everyone seems to think they are fine, though Janelle hasn’t gotten up the nerve yet!

### **BEGGING**

While shopping a couple weeks ago we had an exceptionally large number of beggars approach us. In addition, I had a couple students explain to me their financial woes in order that I should “pray for them”. It continues to be such a difficult issue for me.

After the students told me of their needs, not asking for anything, I mentioned to Connie, showing my cynicism, that I was tired of people “not begging from me”! But, it has really made me think about how we feel about missionaries or other worthy organizations asking for money all the time.

One missionary friend visiting from Tanzania last week said that she had an interesting conversation with one particular national. He was shocked to find out that she doesn’t just ask for money from family and friends. His view, and maybe a view of many of the nationals, is that you aren’t much of a friend if someone can’t ask you for money whenever they want!

We have been told on a couple occasions that if it makes you feel better to give to them, then go ahead...but, it “enables” many of them rather than really helps in the long run as I have mentioned before.

One particular Malawian has befriended us after meeting Connie at the grocery store. He is a “produce man”. As we were warned, he asked to come see us and we fully expected him to ask for financial help. He didn’t actually ask though speaking of his desire to go to the University and not affording it. However, one wonders the intentions as he spent 60 Kwacha (60 cents) to take the mini bus to the campus – money that he really doesn’t have making \$4 a week on average.

Since then we have “hired” him periodically to pick up items at the market for us. He often pushes Connie’s cart around for her at the grocery store!

### **CHITUPI by Britney**

Chitipi is a wonderful place for children with no place to go, no family, or no one who cares about them. Chitipi provides all those things for them. Some would call it an orphanage, but really, it’s one big family. That family includes 23 children right now. They work a farm. *Children of the Nations* started Chitipi, and it has been very successful in rescuing children.

The children have many different stories. One child lived with his uncle who starved and beat him. He was tied to a tree, and the only way he survived was by his cousin or some relative bringing him food. When he came to Chitipi, he was very malnourished. Now, he smiles and laughs and plays.

There is a family of 3 or 4 children who had no mother, and their father died trying to feed them. He starved himself to give them food. When he died, the children didn’t know he was dead. All they knew was that he wouldn’t answer them and wouldn’t wake up. As they were crying, a woman walking by heard them and asked what was wrong. They told her that they didn’t think their daddy liked them anymore, because he wasn’t talking to them. She went inside and saw that he was dead. The children were taken to Chitipi by a social worker. I read to Ida, the girl of that family, every week.

At Chitipi, the children are happy. Many come from horrible backgrounds, but they are safe and have a wonderful home now. Every Thursday, we (some students from ABC Christian Academy) visit Chitipi, play games, and read to the children.

True, the standards there are much lower than American standards, and some Americans would be shocked if they visited. But compared to many homes in Malawi, these children are quite well off. They love to hold hands and read and play soccer (football).

### **LEFTIES**

A couple students asked how we were adjusting to driving on the left side of the road. I explained that I am pretty used to it and no longer think about it much. The greatest danger is looking the wrong way at stops for oncoming traffic...though there are few stop signs or “robots” (stop lights). In fact there are only 2 robots in Lilongwe that I can think of right now – a city of over 500,000 people!

While Shea was playing a computer hunting game the other day he was traveling down the highway in his truck. As we watched we realized he was driving on the left side of the road! We asked him if he intended to be driving that way and he said, "In Malawi you drive on the left side," like duh, dad! Fortunately it wasn't one of those car games that have oncoming traffic!

### **CYNICISM**

I have found it difficult at times not to be cynical about many of the cultural differences here that I consider unbiblical or just not pleasing to my sensibilities. Every culture has good and bad elements – some maybe worse than others – and as we minister to people here, it is absolutely necessary to leave the cynicism somewhere else!

As Connie and I teach a Marriage and Family class the second semester we need wisdom in really thinking through some cultural differences that are not necessarily unbiblical. An example may be the fact that physical touch between married people is extremely uncommon as it may give the kids the encouragement to try it themselves, as one student put it! As an American I think that it is part and parcel of love, yet there are other ways of showing love to our wives in public – I just don't want to!!!

We really want to challenge ideas that hinder close relationships as husband and wife relationships appear to be very utilitarian and in many, many cases not particularly loving as "Christ loved the church".

### **DAVIE'S GRANDFATHER**

One of Connie's students wrote a paper about his "grandfather" who takes in orphans including him when he was one. It was such a wonderful paper about his kindness to these children over the years that Connie told Davie she wanted to meet him.

So, yesterday he was coming to a meeting of the Presbyterian leadership with a friend and came by the campus just to meet Connie. We had a wonderful talk...we decided that it was partly due to the fact that they were older men 50s or 60s and were very outgoing personalities. We think due to this, they treated us on their level instead of being somewhat subservient (which is how most Malawians treat whites).

It was so refreshing - we just laughed and had a great time talking about culture and doctrine and everything else. I practiced the "you may leave my house" process for the first time – Malawians consider it rude to leave if you are a guest, so wait until the host suggests it in some way. We had had a few pregnant pauses and finally I remembered this little cultural item and asked if they had other engagements - immediately they said oh yes, they needed to leave to get home! It was such a kick.

Please pray with us,  
Kelly and Connie and kids

## **January 1, 2004**

HAPPY NEW YEAR FRIENDS,

### **CHRISTMAS IN MALAWI**

The morning dawned bright and clear...it was just like a novel. Only no snow! Britney and I are probably the most keyed into "environment" and we both were pretty weirded out by sweating on Christmas...not because of the fireplace. In the mid-afternoon it rained a bit and cooled things down more to our liking!

Three of the single teachers at the Academy (our children's school) came soon after we arose to join our little throng in the Christmas story reading, eating, and unwrapping. After they left and a bit of relaxing, some of the students staying on campus to work over the holiday came over for goodies and to teach us Bowa, a wonderful African board game that we purchased (hand carved like most things) for Joel for Christmas. It is a great game.

The ABC traditional Christmas day ends with a potluck dinner at 5. About 25 of us or so brought in lots of traditional and non-traditional (rice) American Christmas foods. From what we understand, the traditional Malawian Christmas includes rice and chicken and possibly some thobwa (drink made from millet) that is a real luxury. As the Malawians eat nsima (maize mush) and beans or greens nearly every day of the year, this is really special and something really looked forward to. It is not surprising that they frequently note that eating at our house is like Christmas to them.

Sang some carols (with trumpet, piano and guitar), played ping pong, and watched the Muppets Christmas Carol movie. Quite a Christmas. We were all quite too tired to shoot off the fireworks we had purchased in keeping with Malawian tradition (of course most Malawians can't afford such extravagance). So, the fireworks waited until the 26<sup>th</sup>.

### **BOXING DAY**

On the 26<sup>th</sup> we joined our British friends, the Taylors, and the Jansens (Dr. on campus) for a trip to the Nkhoma Mission south of Lilongwe. Boxing Day is a national holiday here that commemorates the wealthy putting left over food and clothing in "boxers" that the poor leave out on their windowsills. (I think that is correct!)

We traveled to the mission that houses the offices for the CCAP Nkhoma Synod (Church of Central Africa Presbyterian). Nkhoma is half an hour south of the city and half an hour on dirt roads.

We experienced our first trip of rainy season on village roads. I am afraid our concern for slipping off the road (nearly all are shaped with very little level surface so the water will wash off) and being unable to see through fogged windows made Shea rather uneasy. We tried to calm him and encouraged him to pray, which he did. That evening he prayed thanking God for keeping us safe...it all made quite an impression and we felt badly that we had concerned him! But, it provided a good lesson!

When we arrived the museum was closed, but Dave Taylor sought out the General Secretary's house and his son, who happens to be one of our students, came to open it for us and we had a lovely lunch next to an elephant foot! The elephant had been shot because he was making havoc with the mission many years ago. Kind of disgusting really!

It reminded us of the stories that one student tells of his village in the south that is near a large river. During the elephant season they have to keep a wary eye to the river as the elephants will come searching for food in the village. They have to grab their food and run as the elephants will destroy their houses to get to the food!

The walls had pictures of all the missionaries and heads of the mission over the past 100 years. We noted that the second cause of death was animal attacks! In addition, the typewriter that was used to prepare the final manuscript of the Chechewa Bible was on display...rather historic item!

We enjoyed a hike towards Nkhoma Phiri (mountain). Dave Taylor's father, from Britain, noted that there aren't the nice sign posts along the way for tourists like along the Oregon coast!

The views were amazing as things have radically changed from the dry season. It looks much more like the Africa that we envisioned prior to coming. Everything is green and lush. It is so strange to go from the dry season – drier than Wyoming – to what feels like a tropical rainforest! It isn't nearly that wet, but for those of us from Wyoming, it seems that way. Nearly every field boasts the new crop of maize, little leaves poking up everywhere.

The mission has a hospital that is one of the nicer hospitals in Malawi, however it is much like others as the family is expected to stay nearby so they can care for the sick person's needs (food, clothing, cleaning, etc). It was interesting to see the hospital that some of the kids on campus were born in! We don't have birthing facilities available here.

### **HAPPY NEW YEAR**

Having finished off our first semester at ABC we are incredibly thankful that God brought us to this incredible place. That we have had these experiences is so far beyond what we would ever have conceived, planned or imagined in our safe, comfortable life in Wyoming.

It was so kind and gracious of our Lord to have brought us here to experience the lives and love of His people in a really foreign land. We appreciate your prayers and support over the past many months and now pray that we can help bring these people and their needs to you for your prayers. God bless you in the year of our Lord, 2004.

Tsalani bwino,  
Kelly and Connie and kids

## January 3, 2004

Hello Dear Friends,

### **THYOLO (pronounced cholo)**

Our first extensive travel was to Thyolo in the southern region of Malawi this past week. South of the former capital of Malawi, Zomba, Thyolo is the center of tea and coffee plantations. It is also near the Mulanji Mastiff, the tallest mountain in Malawi at about 9000 feet

The Spencers booked a colonial house on the Lujere Tea Estate at the base of the mountain. It was “Just Another Beautiful Day In Paradise (JABDIP)” for all of us. At \$50 per night for each of our families we were situated in the middle of the tea estate, with a private pool, views of the mountain that were unbelievable, fresh pineapple growing in the garden, two cooks/housekeepers, gardeners (who of course clean the car before you leave), and a private tour of the estate including the factory. Obviously the colonialists did everything possible to make their move to Africa comfortable!

One of the managers showed us the tea growing process as we drove on the bumpy dirt roads winding through the fields and fields of tea “bushes”. In Malawi the tea plucking is back breaking labor of course as everything is done by hand. The factory manager, who is Indian, explained that other tea growing areas in the world use much more machinery.

Each “plucker” has an area he is responsible for and circulates through the area using a pole laid across the bushes to determine which leaves to pluck – the ones that are a certain age (determined by color) and height. Henderson, our guide, explained that there are two reasons the bushes are kept at about waist level. First, Malawians are short and they can reach the leaves that way. Secondly, it keeps the fields looking good! I really thought there might be a scientific reason!

The minimum weight in leaves the pluckers take in a day is 50 kg (over 100 pounds) and are paid 65 Kwacha (65 cents) for that work. The incentive to pick more is 1.65 Kwacha per extra kg.

The processing of the tea takes only 24 hours through drying and oxygenation. This tea estate is quite large and has 2 such factories with guards at the gate that act and look like well trained military officers.

### **ZOMBA**

Following two nights in Thyolo we headed to Zomba, the former capital of Malawi over the bumpiest tarmac I have ever driven. Zomba is located directly south of Lake Malawi at the base of Zomba Plateau. The plateau is about 7000 feet in elevation and has beautiful forests, breathtaking views of Malawi, and a gorgeous hotel named Ku Chawe Inn. We took an extensive hike up the mountain to an forest observation tower. We could see for probably hundreds of miles in nearly every direction.

Not many people have been awoken at 5:30 AM by baboons clamoring on their roof! Connie suggested the crow-like sounds on the roof of the hotel might be baboons and I thought she was crazy. We looked anyway. Probably 6 or 7 baboons were scampering and hanging out on the roof. At one point it was a bit scary as a mother and child were right near us on a roof by our door and the male ran across the roof towards us. We just slipped inside, hearts skipping a bit! Connie asked the kids if they knew anyone at home that had been awoken by baboons (being funny). Janelle noted that one of her classmates in Lilongwe has a pet baboon!

While at breakfast one particular female baboon with her baby hanging on was coming up to the patio of the restaurant. Our kids were out on the patio surrounding a fellow eating his breakfast nearby. One of the restaurant hostesses was staying nearby with a sling shot in hand intended to keep the baboon at bay. Apparently, they are frightened by the sight of it as she did not have anything to shoot at it.

Just as one of the older children noted to us that the younger kids were appearing to bother the gentleman eating breakfast, the baboon swooped down and wiped out the patron's table! She knocked dishes off trying to grab the food! Everyone jumped back and the hostess took a swipe at her with an umbrella over the table. After everyone cleared away, the baboon took another swoop down and grabbed a lovely piece of toast for her breakfast. We weren't sure if the fellow was more upset with the baboon or our kids.

### **BUGS**

As a family we have determined that though the Malawians have only two seasons actually – rainy and dry – there really are several. Flies, ants, Termites, Ngumbi, etc.

Those of you living in warm climates are used to bugs. Wyoming has no bugs. Malawi has bugs. We are currently in the ant season (ngumbi have disappeared). So, we have put cereals and sticky things in plastic, airtight containers in our pantry. This morning we pulled out the “airtight” Corn Pops (our first purchase of this treat of a cereal) container and were welcomed by these itty-bitty ants crawling all over it. I figured we could just wash them off...but, Connie noted that they were all over inside.

Shea and Janelle didn't miss a beat eating their cereal, ants and all. I soaked mine in milk hoping to draw them to the top. Fortunately only found one.

Thanks to all who have been praying for us. Recently we received a letter from one friend noting that she was praying for us every night; for our health, experiences, good worship on Sunday, and opportunities to teach. We are so very thankful that people care so much to be thinking of us and coming before the throne of grace on our behalf.

Tsalani bwino,  
Kelly and Connie and kids

### **January 24, 2004 - with pic: Zambia Pics**

Dear Friends,

With the arrival of Connie's parents, Jane and Dallas Bissell, we have had the great fun of not just writing to them about our experiences, but having them along for the ride! As they can attest, it isn't the same in writing!

### **LEARNING ZAMBIA**

As part of our plan for them (and for us) we scheduled a safari in Zambia, the country west of Malawi. It is about 5 times the size of Malawi and according to our driver (the safari company picked us up at our door) it is much more prosperous.

As we drove through the more rural parts he explained that about 75% of Zambia is urban as opposed to Malawi at 20%. More people live in the cities because it is not as much a farming country. This is due to the primary export being copper.

It still looks very poor like Malawi but Godfrey says that more people have cars even in the villages and the capital is much more developed. Godfrey was raised by educated parents and all the children attended college before taking their places in business or, in his case, as a wildlife specialist (of some sort).

### **MATERNALIZING**

For nearly 4 hours Godfrey taught me traditional beliefs – of which he holds to none it seems – and the differences between the matriarchal and patriarchal tribes. He is quite frustrated by both systems that tend to create unhealthy family life. The way some families respond to the traditional systems is very different as we have talked with students, but he boiled them down to the following concepts.

In the matriarchal system the mother's family (uncles, aunts, brothers, etc) in essence hold sway on family life. They have a great deal of responsibility for the children rather than the mother and father. The negatives are that the father tends to be left out of many decisions regarding family life and encouraged to find his worth elsewhere...leading to lifestyles not very conducive to emotional, mental or spiritual health.

In the patriarchal, some tribes have encouraged a ruling by the father that is dictatorial. In addition, the number of wives determines his wealth and position in society so there is quite an incentive to polygamy.

We have at least two students whose extended families swooped in following the death of the mother or father stripping the children and possibly living parent of all they had as if it had been willed to the relatives rather than immediate family.

Chisomo lost her father a number of years ago. His family showed up at their doorstep to take their things. She, her sister, and her mother all stood their ground refusing even entrance to their home. At one point the mother was gone, so Chisomo stood outside the door keeping the uncles and aunts at bay and her sister locked the door behind her.

She was convinced that had the relatives prevailed they could have won a lawsuit. Godfrey did not think so as traditional tribal law (unwritten) stands alongside written Malawi law in court.

We stopped after 3 hours to have a lunch that had been packed by the safari company. The first stop drew too many people, primarily kids, so we moved on to another location. Godfrey noted that as tourist traffic picked up through the villages, the lifestyles of the villagers changed. He said, "The kids need to concentrate on school," referring to the fact that tourists frequently gave handouts and so the whole village would drop everything when a safari vehicle passed through.

The safari company stopped at a little makeshift store (shack) that was named "Bill's Investments" because one of the tourist's names was Bill. He wanted his picture with the storefront. After explaining to the store owner what they wanted, the owner explained that he wanted paid for it. This is very common as they have been paid before or they think the picture is being used for great profit in the United States or Europe and want some of the action.

### **KAFUNTA LODGE**

After five hours of grueling travel on the worst roads (not four wheel drive) I have ever traveled, we arrived at Kafunta Lodge on the Luangwa River bordering the South Luangwa National Park. Godfrey kept noting that city drivers take forever to get there because they drive too slowly and carefully. I was completely exhausted upon arrival!

The lodge we stayed in is made up of cottages built on stilts overlooking a swamp and river teeming with Pukus (little antelope), elephants, hippos, and birds. The walls and roofs are made of thatch and our cottage was a three bedroom, 1 bath doozy.

It was nicer than “camp” living, but not many steps above. (Connie says it was WAY above camp living. Had electricity, plumbing, refrigerator, hot pot- nicer than most hotels, just a little buggy and humid- now I’ll but out of his letter ☺) I decided that there really isn’t anything you can do to keep bugs away in a place like that! As you know from my last update, bugs are my thing!!!

Rules for lodging include never leaving the cottage at night without a guard as the elephants and hippos pass through the area at night. We swam and soaked in a hot springs tub looking out at the Pukus and elephants playing!

### **CREATIVITY OF GOD IN ZAMBIA**

We first took a late afternoon / night drive. Before we had even reached the Park we had seen Vervet Monkeys, a hippo, a huge number of elephants, and various birds. When we entered the park at about 5:30, it was like being in a zoo with no cages! The animals were everywhere. At one point we saw elephants, zebras, Pukus, and (I think) warthogs while looking one direction!

We prayed for lions and got them while search-lighting at dark. Three females (one a youngster) were eating something (maybe warthog) in a thicket. We drove up to them within 5 feet! I finally asked about our safety and our guide said it was just fine...they were eating (just kidding). We just sat and watched them amazed for quite some time. We again ran into this group the second day.

We kept thinking through as we drove what we still wanted to see and soon added giraffes, monitor lizards, and crocodiles to the list of sightings. It was quite amazing to drive right up to the giraffes standing 20 feet away with nothing between us! They are so beautiful.

While facing down an elephant on the road at one point we received the elephant warning, a loud blast of her trunk and ears waving. Rocky, our guide, had explained that when warning it makes itself as “big” as possible. If it gets charging mad, it gets quiet, lowers its head, pulls its ears in, and begins to charge.

This female didn’t want to go off the road and get in the bog so continued to move ahead of us all the while getting rather upset. She would turn, raise her trunk and “yell” at us, turn around and move forward again. We really were a bit uptight, but figured we could trust Rocky!

She finally moved off the road and allowed us to pass and we breathed a sigh of relief. We heard at dinner that night that one driver did get charged and the elephant put a hole in the front of the vehicle puncturing the radiator! No one got hurt.

I guess I could go on and on talking about God’s incredible creativity! It drew us all to praise as we saw all the incredible colors of birds, shapes of animals, huge termite mounds...all incredible signs that point to a God of order and interest!

If you ever have the opportunity...just do it!

By God’s Grace,  
Kelly and Family

## **February 9, 2004**

Dear Friends and Family,

We appreciated all the Christmas letters and cards we received this year...probably more than any year. Connie’s folks brought a pile of them over when they visited as they collect our mail in the States. It is good to

hear the personal news of so many. It is amazing how out of touch we feel even though email is such a marvelous tool of communication.

Periodically we receive political news by friends and family, but really do not get it any other way here simply because most news here, if foreign, is from South Africa and the United Kingdom and we don't seek it out on the web. It has been a nice break really!

By the way, Connie disagreed with my characterization of Kafunta Lodge in Zambia that I described in the last update. She considered it way above "camp" living. It really was a nice place, especially the dining area and food that went with it. It also had electricity, a little refrigerator, plumbing and bugs...oh, I already mentioned that.

### **IN A NAME**

When I began instrument placement tests last fall – that is "dry season" - I quickly learned that there is much more attention to naming children in Malawi, and probably Africa in general, than in the United States.

Frequently my Assistant, Clement, would point out the meaning of an individual's name. Some were quite obvious like Blessing, Gracious, or Rejoice. But, others of course were in Chichewa and had to be translated - Thokozani (Thankful) or Chisomo (Grace).

The process of naming a child is a bit different as well. Robson, our housekeeper / cook's wife, Efrida, just gave birth to a child on the 22nd of December. They explained that they would be naming the child about a month after birth.

We are not entirely sure why this is but have wondered if there is a certain amount of detachment that is encouraged until the child has lived at least a month. Being that the infant mortality rate is extremely high, this seems to make some sense.

In addition, someone outside the family is sometimes brought in as a consultant in the naming. Actually, they are just asked to name the child because of a certain respect that is shown to them by the family. Paul Chichen, the Director of ABC, was recently hired as a "consultant" by a golf caddy! They have known each other a long time and he was invited to the house with his family for the ceremony. It was the first time a white person had been in their house!

Paul explained to us that it is understood that if you name someone's child you are like the God-parent. The responsibilities are much greater here as a Godparent than in the United States. You will be responsible for their schooling fees (through college) and things like shoes periodically! I wake up in cold sweats that someone will respect me that much! I am told I should have no fear of that.

### **NEW TERM, NEW FEES**

With the start of a new term at ABC comes the inevitable flow of students who are struggling to pay the necessary fees and tuition. As I have noted before, the cost of attending African Bible College is about \$960 per year including tuition, housing, meals, and books. The actual cost is between \$2000 and \$2500 per student, most of which comes from American supporters of the college.

It is a new world for us to have the Business Manager give us a list of students who are needing help financially that we should pray for their needs and possibly help with their accounts. One particular student was able to make enough money over the 6 week break to get back for the second semester – he could pay for the mini-bus ride that is (probably \$6 or so)!

Unfortunately, he doesn't have the money to pay for school. As a teacher by profession, his wife and children will continue to receive pay, but it really is just enough for them to live on (barely). Generally they will get help from family members as this is a culture of family. You are the worst of worst if you do not provide for your extended family when needs arise and you have the ability.

## **LEAVING A LEGACY**

I want to end this note with a call to those of you who truly are seeking opportunities to serve in the Lord in a very tangible ways. Many of you have been involved in “short term” mission work, spending a week or two in another country or city helping build buildings or lead Bible studies.

If you are retired or able to take a sabbatical from work, I want to encourage you to pray for wisdom in using that “freedom” to work without great financial hindrances. If you are a music or Bible teacher in that place of life, please consider stepping out to help train the Malawian church in those areas. There is such a huge need in this country where African Bible College is serving to assist the church in its spiritual growth.

I specifically am praying that someone will come forward to help these new musicians at ABC become proficient enough to pursue music as a teaching career here at ABC Malawi. Please join me in praying for this help.

Zikomo Kwambiri,  
Kelly and Crew

Ps. We would also appreciate prayer regarding the International Chamber Seminar (music mission to Austria) as we are beginning plans and seeking the Lord’s guidance for this summer.

## **February 20, 2004 - with Prison Pix**

### **CULTURAL INSENSITIVITY**

One of the cultural norms I have spoken of in past notes has been the non-handholding, non-kissing, or other public displays of affection by members of the opposite sex, whether married or not.

In recent weeks, Connie and I have become just a bit more insensitive to the non-handholding part of this culture. One morning this past week we were holding hands on our walk and passed by a couple female workers. The stare of one of them at our hands reminded me of the “deer-caught-in-the-headlights” look.

Our first class of really talking about marriage and cultural norms occurred last Friday. We were hoping that the students would freely share their thoughts and also be open to critiquing culture – theirs and ours – when it comes to practices that are not helpful to the marriage relationship.

We were thrilled by all the sharing and the excellent discussion. In speaking of “leaving and cleaving” we spent a great deal of time talking about “leaving” as the extended family is so incredibly close and it is the norm for parents to retain a great deal of authority over their children even after they have started their own families.

But, the students were very open to discussing the problems associated with this cultural practice and in fact were sometimes much more critical than we are as those who see the closeness of the African family as an important stabilizing influence in the society.

The students wrote a couple pages each of their cultural traditions regarding dating, engagement, marriage and child training so we will be passing on some of their work in explaining these things in future notes.

### **MALNUTRITION**

The clinic on campus built a “malnutrition ward” a couple years ago with the intent of serving small children (babies primarily) that have no one to nurse them out of malnutrition. Chisomo, which means “grace” is a 5 month old boy who currently weighs 6 pounds. He was brought in by Nancy Dimmock who has a nursery for abandoned babies.

In addition she brought in a girl last week that is 3 years old and probably weighs 25 pounds. When she arrived she didn’t smile, was very quiet, and of course could not walk. She has made incredible progress partly due to

the attention she now receives. Not only does she get meals regularly, but teachers from the Academy drop by on their way home from school to play with her! She is now smiling, laughing and playing. She had a great time grabbing my fingers and swinging her arms this week when I met her. She didn't want me to go, but kept on smiling.

Her mother died after she was born. I believe that her dad had a couple boys as well and they were fine, but it sounds like a girl was not a priority in the feeding category. It is amazing to see these children as I have never seen children who are malnourished! They have the look of older children (because they are older), but their body is so small. It is understandable that they also generally do not act quite their age as everything is affected by the lack of nutrition including the inability to walk oftentimes.

### **VILLAGE AMERICANS**

Two workers with Ministry of Hope (orphan feeding program) dropped by the house recently. We had spoken very briefly with them as Miguel is a musician and helped lead worship recently for Sunday night chapel.

Our talk with them was quite eye-opening. Both come from the San Diego area and are here for about 6 months (they have been here for about 1 month). As we sat in our lovely house at our large dining room table they talked about their adjustment to village life.

We really haven't talked with anyone that comes from the West and lives like the impoverished Africans live. I have often wondered what it is like to move to Africa and actually live in a hut and eat what they eat. We somewhat found out from Miguel and Hillary.

When they arrived they were in a hotel in Lilongwe and traveled to the villages to work for the feeding program, but after a week or so moved out to the villages – about 1.5 hours away. Miguel explained that when the men (2 Americans and a Malawian) were seeing their home for the first time the other American was absolutely overwhelmed and very somber as they noted a huge spider (6 or 7 inches across) and the hole in the floor outside for toilet, buckets for washing, and no electricity.

As Miguel talked about it I found myself very much in agreement with his friend! The friend ended up not staying there that night but went into town again while Miguel and the Malawian stayed. Hillary noted that Kyle is now quite at home and she said he was with her driving into town having not taken a shower or had a shave for a week and seeming quite at ease!

They get several buckets of water each morning, carrying them 2 kilometers, cook their rice, tomatoes and greens for breakfast and dinner every day, awaken at 4 or 5, and go to bed when it gets dark – no electricity.

Miguel said that the first time he went to the bathroom at night he stuck his head into the little tiny door of the toilet “stall” and flashed his light in. There were huge cockroaches everywhere that scattered. He was quite disgusted and told the others he couldn't possibly go to the toilet that night and would just have to hold it! He joked that he now just plays with them. Actually, they do their best not to use the toilet at night.

### **MORE DEATH**

Abraham is doing better (though needing transfusions frequently), but Yamiko lost her father in a mini-bus accident last weekend. More sadness on campus, but normal nonetheless. He was their only source of income, so Yamiko may be without school fees. Her mother is moving to her family Zomba I believe.

It is just so unbelievable to be so surrounded by so much death, disease, and sorrow. The adjustment to the United States once again should prove to be a challenge. As a family we have often spoken of what it will be like to be in the United States again.

We have heard that adjustment can be difficult but I imagine it depends upon how much a person focuses on their own experiences. Easy to do as there are so many and you are busting at the seams to tell all. I figure that since I have been writing constantly for 6 months I shouldn't have anything more to tell when we return! Remind me. I can always just refer folks to Update Number 432 so that I don't go on and on!

We do hope that we retain some sense of the preciousness of life...remembering the morning prayers of so many Africans thanking God that we have been given another day.

Tsalani bwino,  
Kelly & Crew

Ps. The photos attached are of the prisoners in the Kachere Prison Bible study the students lead every Thursday. It was incredibly unusual that they allowed me to take pictures and video of the prison.

## **February 11, 2004**

### **UPDATE ON ABRAHAM**

When we returned to campus yesterday after visiting Abraham at the main hospital in the city, Mark Borsema (one of the ABC doctors) called me and told me we just needed to bring him to the clinic and get him out of that horrible hospital. We (Mark, his wife, Connie and I) went to the Lilongwe Central Hospital and retrieved him today to bring him to the campus clinic. They had given him 2 medications in the past week! He should have been on all sorts of medication. His brother finally talked them into giving him 1 transfusion that they were supposed to give him several days ago. According to Mark, the hospital receives 47 cents per patient per year for funding.

Abraham was sleeping on the "veranda" which is a long porch / hallway open to the outside along the rooms of the hospital. Beds are lined up all the way along the wall and the family stays and cooks for and takes care of the patient right by their bed. Yesterday it rained very hard and all the stuff the families had got very wet! The clothes cleaning facilities are the concrete drainage ditches outside in the courtyard.

Moving to the clinic - they have 2 rooms, provide 3 meals per day and a nurse 24 hours - was like moving from a slum to a king's palace! Hopefully, it will help and maybe he can continue on for sometime with the right care.

Keep praying..  
Kelly D

## **March 3, 2004 - with Mponela pix**

Hello Everyone,

### **MPONELA ORPHAN FEEDING**

Usually we think that a little trip to a particular ministry (like orphan feeding programs) is a bit intimidating and often do not look forward to it the closer the time comes. Once again we thought it a good idea to go see a ministry, but were a bit nervous, and traveled with Jay and Laura Stoms (Professor of Theology and new wife) to the "Ministry of Hope" orphan feeding program in a village about one hour north of Lilongwe.

It is both a study of great care taken by a combination of foreigners and Malawian nationals and the failing of foreign intervention. "Ministry of Hope" was founded for the purpose of taking care of the orphans in various villages. The Malawian government does not like the sound of "orphanages" both for the apparent failing of the community to take care of its people and the taking children out of their culture.

Therefore, Ministry of Hope began putting together programs in villages that provide a good, solid meal once up to six times a week depending on the village involvement. The orphans are cared for by various families in the village so there is no "orphanage" per se. The program in this particular village had church backing and fed

the orphans from a pastor's home. According to one of the leaders, the church became unsupportive because they were not getting what they hoped from the program...possibly foreign funds and attention.

They were quite surprised when Fletcher, an ABC graduate and the Malawian Director of Ministry of Hope, let them know in a meeting that Ministry of Hope would run the program itself rather than pay for water from the church. So, after a period of time when the ministry was feeding between 300 and 500 children, it was moved to a smaller location and the numbers dropped dramatically. In addition, volunteers became scarcer as they possibly saw little "return" for their involvement!

Nearby, a village was developing its own feeding program and observed the program in Mponela. When Fletcher saw that the community was coming together to build a feeding shelter and was coordinating all work to expand the program, Ministry of Hope provided funding for materials. It has been an extraordinary lesson in "ownership" as the village project that we visited was developed primarily by Fletcher using foreign money. It appears that many of the Malawians involved were more interested in the foreign "purse strings".

On the other hand the other community has come together to participate in caring for their children and is growing slowly but very effectively. Fletcher has been very careful to keep the Ministry of Hope in the background as support for the project. The MOH has also noted that there is more "community" in the village and the transient nature of the first village as a market center has added to its difficulties in caring for its children.

While I mostly stood around talking with kids and ABC representatives, taking pictures and videotaping, Connie and the kids helped in a variety of ways. One of the ABC students noted that Connie was cutting tomatoes and serving rice. He said, "You are a very wonderful white lady." One volunteer asked if Connie had ever cut tomatoes! Connie responded that in the U.S. she does her own cooking though here she has a cook. It was quite a surprise to the woman.

At one point I noticed Joel standing in the clutches of one ABC student obviously being interviewed in front of the middle school age kids. He told us later that he told them what we were doing in Africa.

It is interesting how these experiences both brighten our days and sadden our hearts. The water was filthy that they drew from a nearby well, flies were everywhere, and the general conditions were really horrible. Azungus can hardly touch food or water in these conditions without getting "Malawian Stomach"!

A little girl about 10 years old picked up a fish (they are tiny little fish that are often used as relish) that was lying on the ground and broke the head off and offered it to Janelle. The little girl was the first child to be fed by this program a couple years ago and has "Down's Syndrome". Janelle politely declined the offer and the little girl popped it in her mouth.

### **MALAWIAN DATING**

We promised to pass on some culture from the students' pens – here we go. This was written by Ernest Kububa, a member of our marriage class and tuba player. His plan is to go into the police or military force following graduation:

"In most African cultures there is no dating when it comes to premarital relationships. In my culture, Ngoni, it was an abomination for a man to associate himself with ladies. Moreover you would rarely find men in a village because they were engaged in field work. They lived on hunting and gathering foods. Because of this it was hard for a man to be found loafing in a village. Nowadays things have changed. This is due to the coming of foreign cultures and the westernization of Africa.

"It has to be emphasized that even now most African cultures do not have the term 'dating' as the Westerners do. If you happen to 'date' a woman, then it must be a commitment, but that does not mean that you are going to marry the lady. When you have made such a commitment, which comes after you have proposed love to the girl, you are advised not to flirt around with any other girls. Even if it is your girl friend, it is not advised that

you spend much time at a solitary place with her. This is discouraged because you might end up doing unnecessary things.

“At this time parents are not involved in your relationship but you are free to tell your parents if you are sure and serious about your relationship. In the past, you were supposed to inform your parents about your relationship through your uncle. But things have changed. I think it varies from family to family. I already told my parents about my relationship with Esnarth and she has been visiting my home for several occasions. It also depends on how free you are with your parents, for most African families do not relate well with their children. There is a very big gap between parents and children.”

We have found Kububa’s telling of the “dating” rites of Malawi to be very consistent with those we have heard before. It is interesting to evaluate each aspect and see the positives and negatives throughout. It makes an American parent long for the same for their child in some ways and thankful that we live in the United States at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century for other aspects.

Happy Martyr’s Day to all of you...especially you Brits.  
Kelly and Crew

Ps. Martyr’s Day is a National Holiday memorializing the people who died in the rejection of British Colonization in the early 60s. There was no out and out battle, but Britain didn’t exactly give up without a bit of struggle.

## **February 24, 2004**

Hello Everyone – an especially long hello if you get my drift,

### **LANGUAGE**

It is always interesting to note the way various peoples translate their language into English. No language can be translated into another without some rather strange and humorous effect!

Early in our stay in Malawi we noted with a bit of a smile the Malawian’s use of “this one” or “that one” when referring to another person. It was so impersonal and really kind of funny! Very recently we found out that Chichewa has no personal pronoun for he or she...there is no difference in the sexes! Therefore, they do not say that “I am chatting with him” or “her”.

But it goes even deeper in that when they are using English (as their second language) sometimes it is difficult to use the correct pronoun. The result is a mixing of the sexes. Recently, we were reading an article on a rape case in the courts written up in one of the biggest newspapers in Malawi. The first article I had read was very well written and sounded like your normal newspaper article in the States.

However, it soon became apparent that most of the writers were indeed Malawians whose second language was English and this court case was an example. On such a sensitive subject that the “he” and “she’s” make a huge difference, there were a couple turning around of who was the he and who was the she in the case!

I have been reading a book called “Psalms in Congregational Celebration” by O. Palmer Robertson, one of the founders of the Presbyterian Church in America, of which we are members. Palmer is the brother-in-law of the founder of African Bible College and we are currently living in his house on campus. He has written many books, most of which are seminary level tomes of knowledge!

I chuckled when I ran across a particular sentence where Dr. Robertson is explaining that Christ prayed for us and the reason we are Christians is because He prayed for us...but in Palmer’s wording, having been in Malawian quite some time, Jesus prayed “for that one”.

Another language idiosyncrasy is the Malawian reply to a question that demands a “yes” or “no” reply. When asked, “You didn’t go home?” If they didn’t go home they will say “yes”. If they did, they will say “no”. It actually fits better than how we respond, but took a long time to get used to it. One of American children on campus has picked it up and that really throws us for a loop as we are not sure how to interpret an azungu doing it!

## **LOANS**

Before we had been in Malawi too long we were told that a “loan” to a Malawian should be treated as a gift...many will not pay back a loan. One faculty member was careful to note that they really probably intend to pay it back, but it is farther in the future than Westerners care!

Therefore, I have disliked being asked for a loan unless the individual really intend to pay it back and so have tried to get an idea for payback or simply told them it was a gift and did not need to be paid back.

One of the caddies at the golf course – something very difficult to get used to, but have noted the number of balls we lose if we don’t use one – asked me for a loan for fertilizer for his maize crop. I used him fairly regularly so trusted him. I decided that we could make a deal that he would pay me back by not receiving all of the tip we normally give the caddy. I thought it very clever as he would still receive a tip, though smaller, and be paid by the course, but would have his loan.

I was warned by all the guys that he probably would not show up on Fridays when we golf. It has been four weeks now! Actually, everyone is a bit surprised because it is a very poor job and any caddying they can do in a week is welcomed – normally they may get 2 opportunities in a week and make about \$4 each time.

## **A TOUGH WEEK**

For about the past 2 weeks we have had one difficulty after another as a campus. Monday morning we were informed that two of the faculty members had hit a 6 year old girl in northern Malawi. The girl was in a coma for a week and died this past weekend. It was not their fault, but incredibly difficult nonetheless.

On Tuesday we were told that on Monday one of the Aides at the Academy went to town and never returned that afternoon or returned home that evening. Paul Chinchon took a couple folks and searched the hospitals and morgues in the evening. She turned up two days after missing having been staying in a hotel. At this point we don’t know what happened.

On Wednesday we found out Abraham is back in the clinic. This could be his last time. They are again asking for blood.

In addition, we were taken aside and informed that our gardener was implicated in the theft of t-shirts that were brought by a group from San Diego. Three of the gardeners were unloading the truck after people had arrived from the airport and took some out of the boxes and stashed them in a worker’s closet. One of the cooks had noticed the shirts and told them they should put them back. Instead they hid them elsewhere.

Our gardener maintains his innocence but we also learned that another cook had been called when our security officer was taking the alleged thieves to their homes to search for the shirts. Someone called the cook to have one of the workers run to the villages of the other two gardeners to hide the shirts before the security guard arrived! In addition, one of my assistants spoke with him and he admitted to him in tears.

It is extremely disappointing as we love our gardener and considered him loyal and trustworthy. On Friday, with tears, we let him go...having to trust our gracious God to provide for his family.

Really it is a rather apt picture of our relationship with God (in a terribly minor way). We receive so many benefits, yet foolishly disobey Him, hurting our relationship with Him. Fortunately our relationship with God is secure and He continues to remain faithful to the covenant He established with us by fulfilling the requirements of that covenant through the death of Christ for our sins.

## **ENGAGEMENT IN MALAWI by Eckton Chinyanga (recently engaged)**

It is now one of the great traditional ceremony taking place in Malawi. Different regions do engagement in different ways and some for different reasons.

In the southern region of Malawi they substitute wedding for engagement. Once they have an engagement the two will straight away start living together as a family. In the northern region of Malawi they do not do it. According to their culture they do not believe in having a big event to get people engaged.

It is in the central region [Lilongwe] where you find engagements very common. They do it because it one of the important stages to wedding. This is a time the people from the man's side and those from the lady's side would come together to know each other. This is such a function where get to know the parents, brothers, and sisters, uncles and aunts and the like.

The second reason for this ceremony is to openly inform the people, parents, friends, relatives that you will marry this lady. So that no one should think of coming to her because, I have already proposed her.

And this act of a man giving a ring to the lady, says that I am committing myself to my friend (boy, girl) that no matter what I will be faithful until we are fully united as husband and wife.

During the engagement [ceremony] the man is supposed to bring new clothes for the lady wear. And he is also to bring items like; hoe, panga knife, mat, pots, plates, cups, cooking materials, etc. These will show that the man is ready and is capable to be with the woman as a responsible person.

Lastly, there is also where a full chicken is roasted and the uncles from both sides will take and eat, and also share it to their own relatives. This signifies that we will work together to help these two get along. Their problems will also be our problems.

### **A NOTE**

We unfortunately missed Eckton's engagement ceremony as I was sick in bed! We were very disappointed as they did all these things and more, such as having three girls come out fully covered and the man is supposed to guess which one is the one to be his wife. If he guessed wrong...uh oh. However, they know what dress she is wearing so there is a bit of cheating! In addition everyone throws money, helping them with their wedding expenses.

Happy Easter to all as you celebrate the suffering Savior Who has risen from the dead and sits at God's right hand having justified us by His grace.

Kelly and Family

## **April 3, 2004 (approximately)**

Dear Family and Friends,

### **TOBACCO**

It is tobacco and ufa season around here. I was told to expect heavily laden trucks to be broken down along the side of the road at every turn and it is certainly true. They pile the trucks well beyond their capacity with bales of tobacco leaves and head to the distribution center on the north side of the city. The trucks are not unloaded often for a week or more, so they stuff them as the truck is out of commission for long periods and new loads cannot be taken.

### **MAIZE TO UFA**

The process of planting, harvesting, grinding, pounding, soaking and preparing Nsima as the daily food fare in Malawi is quite extensive! My first real introduction to maize (corn that is much stiffer and not nearly as sweet at our corn in the United States) came from some students as we discussed the size of some maize stalks.

The taller stalks are local maize and the shorter stalks are hybrid varieties. According to the students the hybrid matures much more quickly and is being encouraged by the Department of Agriculture because of the shorter wet season Malawi has been experiencing in the past few years.

Some Malawians say there is not much difference in taste, however the hybrid does not produce as much nsima (corn mush for meals) as the Malawian maize and therefore is not as productive. In addition the kernel of the hybrid is softer and more susceptible to weevils.

The maize is kept on the stalk until the kernels dry and then the stalk is cut down and the kernels are stripped by hand from the cob. It is then dried more and taken to the mill to be pounded (normally by hand) into meal consistency. They then sift it with large screens to get all the kernel shells out of the flour.

It is soaked for a few days in water and then dried once again (laid out on mats) and powdered with chemicals to keep the weevils out. The soaking is optional; however it appears that the majority like it that way better!

When this is finished the mphale (in between flour) is taken once again to the mill to be pounded once again into very fine flour called Ufa. It is bagged and taken home or sold. The cost of a 50kg (over 100 pounds) bag of Ufa is about \$7 and will feed a family of 6 for most of a month.

The hybrid, because of the softness of the kernels, shells are more difficult to sift because they break up into smaller pieces and end up getting through the sifting process. This impurity is not helpful in the making of nsima!

Of course the pounding of maize and mphale has been women's work and has only recently crossed the sex divide!

### **WEDDINGS IN MALAWI (by Grenna Kaiya – a clarinet player)**

Almost everywhere in Malawi the wedding day is a celebration day. Most people associate wedding and food. The wedding in our culture is involved with so many things and so many people.

A wedding is considered a very big thing and that is why many people are involved in the preparations of the wedding. In most cases the committee is set; this committee oversees everything which will be needed for the wedding. The bride and the groom are part of that committee and they also contribute on what they want for their wedding. The man supposed to pay most of the expenses, and the woman can stay without paying anything, usually the parents also do help in paying the expenses of the wedding.

After the ceremony in the Church, there is always a big reception, this is what most people look forward. At the reception there is dancing, singing songs, eating, and giving gifts to the newly married couple. People give out money and usually there is a competition between the bride's side and the groom's side. Both sides give money showing off and competing who can give a lot of money. The reception last long, not less than five hours. At the wedding there are many people, and it does not matter whether you are invited or not, anybody can come to the wedding and expected to be fed.

### **MISS MALAWI**

We had one of the most unusual experiences of our time in Malawi. One of the ABC graduates that is working for the college now was entered in the Miss Malawi contest so we headed to Blantyre to watch the gala event.

I don't know that I can really describe it. We had decided to go to support Rhoda and because we thought it would be a kick to be able to say we attended a Miss Malawi contest! So, now I have said it.

We arrived a few minutes early and there were about 20 people there! It was a fairly nice convention hall and had the usual ramp and a band stand off to the side. While buying our tickets we asked if there was a child's price as we had Nell Spencer with us. The gentlemen who were running things looked at each other and asked what they had decided on that particular question! They let her in free. It cost us \$12 which is about the most expensive event we have been to here.

Finally, around 8 pm (1 hour after the supposed start time) they began with musical entertainment from a young Malawian Hip Hop artist. He sang along with his recordings – not lip sync, not with background tracks (without the vocal part), but with his full recording. The sound system throughout the evening was cranked up 6 billion decibels and the left rack of speakers were coming and going throughout, alternately blowing out our eardrums and relieving our headaches.

Rhoda performed exceptionally well. She was the only one with a good answer to the question, "If you were crowned Miss Malawi and were invited to speak with His Excellency, the President, Muluzi in his palace, what would you advise him about the youth in Malawi." She spoke the entire time with clarity that was not even hinted at by the other contestants.

She took runner-up and did not have the opportunity to have the big, gold crown lowered from the ceiling by a big, jerky cable and bonk her on the head! The whole ABC contingent was very disappointed and could smell corruption! After we returned to Lilongwe she informed me that someone had taken her clarinet earlier in the week – it was to be her talent – and returned it to her bed following the show! She had talked the event planners into including a "talent" portion of the contest, but no one else competing showed up with a talent so they didn't really want her to perform!

Hope all is well at home and miss you all.

By God's Matchless Grace,  
Kelly and Connie

Ps. Connie recently spoke about a shop owner who at one time stocked Dr. Pepper. He replied to the question of why he doesn't stock it anymore, "I can't keep Dr. Pepper on the shelf so got rid of it."

## **April 22, 2004**

Hello Friends,

My parents just departed for home a couple days ago and we are experiencing the letdown and boredom associated with two weeks of whirlwind touring followed by zilch! We had such a fantastic time with them, seeing new sights and some old, and the inevitable discussions centered on poverty.

Future updates will have more information on some new sights we saw, but for now I must catch up on some old!

### **THE MALL**

When we traveled to Blantyre for the Miss Malawi contest in March it was really quite a change of scenery. I have been there twice before; once to take David Spencer to a golf tournament (Steve, Joel, Jon Jon and I went to play for the weekend while David went about his competition) and when we stayed over on the way to the tea estates in Thyolo.

Each time I have realized how different Blantyre is from Lilongwe. It appears that much of the industry is there and really the financial center of Malawi is located in Blantyre. Therefore, there really is much more sophistication in everything from buildings to shopping.

I kept being surprised by the newness of the office buildings, especially the Malawi Federal Reserve Bank which was not built with brick (that is the most common construction here) and is a beautiful modern design like any Western standard of construction. This past trip we stopped at a new “mall” on the southern edge of the city. Not real large, but nonetheless quite contemporary in design and clean. I couldn’t get over the “niceness” of it. For nearly 7 months we have not been in or seen a shopping center like this.

After being there and seeing the coffee shop and electronics stores and other such things I realized that though I have undergone a great deal of change in my thinking about our materialism in the West, I don’t think it will take any time whatsoever to begin enjoying those physical comforts when we arrive home in June.

### **SOMETHING TO WRITE HOME ABOUT**

Christoph, one of the drivers / workers for the college, and I headed downtown a couple weeks ago to take our car to the shop. When returning in the college truck we stopped off at a friend’s house to pick up Connie’s purse. While pulling out of their gate a driving school student began backing up on the little street straight towards Christoph. He stopped and honked, but the girl kept going and rammed our truck.

As you remember, the police here do not have vehicles. Apparently, the Brits have often provided vehicles, but they do not service them and they are destroyed very soon after arrival. So, the driving instructor, Christoph and I headed to the Police Station to retrieve some officers to investigate the accident. After picking up two policemen we returned across town to the accident scene.

They asked questions, investigated, and we headed back to the station. When we arrived they took the driving instructor into a room first and then us. The head officer talked to Christoph in Chichewa and informed us that we needed to go get the proof of insurance receipt – they don’t carry them in the vehicle in case it is stolen. We drove across town to ABC to retrieve the document and speak with Paul Chinchon.

While we were driving, Christoph informed me that they had asked for a bribe as they told him that they were going to find him at fault. The instructor was a friend of one of the police officers. Christoph was pretty shaken up and probably would have paid had he had the money. I tried to assure him that he would not have to pay the fine and so he did not need to pay any bribes. The fault seemed to be on both drivers, though most was probably on the other driver.

Paul told me that I needed to get the other driver’s insurance information, name, number, police report, etc. Also, I was to tell the head officer that we would be calling the Police Commissioner, who Paul had met with the day before, if things weren’t done in an orderly way. Apparently, they will not normally ask for bribes from whites, but commonly do from nationals.

We went back to the station with me shaking in my boots thinking there had to be someone else that would be better at this “tough guy” stuff than me! I kept assuring myself that this was another good experience to write home about!!! We arrived and I began trying to be very authoritative and one of the officers reminded me that they needed the proof of insurance before they could give us a police report! We had forgotten it at ABC, the very reason we had traveled across town!

So, we returned again, got the insurance proof and the owner of the driving school showed up at the gates asking to just settle the dispute without the police and insurance. I wasn’t sure whether he wanted us to pay or wanted to pay us, but Paul thought he wanted to get it taken care of by paying us. He went about the task of coming up with a price and then the fellow informed us he wanted paid. The conversation ended and we headed to the Police Station once again!

The owner was hemming and hawing at getting his insurance information to the police and so we began to question whether he had insurance. In addition, it was a question whether the instructor had an instructor’s license (required also by law). The police had taken Christoph’s license and said that they would give it back when he paid the fine. So when we returned I told them (while they directed traffic out in the street) that he needed his license and he wouldn’t be paying a fine until a police report was filed. They finally started to back off and asked him to return later to file a statement!

Christoph told me later that the police had laughed that they didn't think the owner had insurance and the instructor had a license. A couple weeks later the owner of the driving school contacted Christoph and offered to repair the truck...not go through all those headaches with the Police!

### **NICK & WILL**

Recently I received an interesting phone call from someone with an English accent. I only caught a little of what he was saying before his phone time ran out. That was the last I heard for a couple weeks and he called once again.

Nick was calling to offer his trumpet to the college when he returned to the UK in a few weeks. Of course I was thrilled as we need everything we can get, especially of good quality. He explained that he was teaching at the Likuni Boys Secondary School on the edge of Lilongwe. We arranged a time for Connie and me to visit and pick up the horn.

We arrived at the gate of the school and were immediately more impressed with the school than the usual public school here. As it turns out it is a Catholic private school and Nick and his friend, Will are here for about 2 to 3 months teaching with an organization called "African Venture" from the UK.

The school is still very run down and minimal in décor – none. But, new roofs (tin) and fairly clean rooms were the standard...quite unusual for schools here. As we spoke with Nick and Will we found out that they were fresh out of high school in England! They were teaching biology, English and some other science to high school students.

Nick told Connie that when they first arrived no one helped them at all, didn't know where anything was, and were assigned one of the lesser faculty homes. It is about a step or two above village living...lights and a hot plate. They have a locker (4 doors) in the main room with each door marked with something like "cupboard" or "fridge". Of course it isn't cooled in any way!

They have had to do all their travel by the mini-buses and noted that they pray every time they get on one for safety. But, despite this, they weren't complaining at all and had really enjoyed their time here. We realized how incredibly good we have had it the past few months on the ABC campus.

We sat and spoke for some time and had tea then I played some duets with Nick. He is really a fine player and hopes to continue playing in University; however he plans to study economics. We left rather disappointed that we hadn't met them sooner so that we could provide these young whippersnappers one decent meal!

We hope you are all well and I won't bother apologizing for the length of this letter as it never seems to change.

By God's Grace,  
Kelly and Crew

### **May 16, 2004**

Greetings everyone. It has been a long time since our last correspondence which has given you plenty of rest from the last one! Things are getting busier and busier as graduation approaches and final performances loom ahead.

We had a wonderful final instrumental music concert last week with the beginner and advanced bands performing along with the jazz combo. We have all (student and teacher) had a great time and it went very well.

We have Baccalaureate, Spring Cantata, Graduation, and Senior Dinner ahead with performances at each. We just finished a trip to Zambia with the Seniors on their annual wildlife trip (safari). They were amazed by the animals. We were surprised by the fact that most had never seen elephants, lions, hyenas, and Cape buffalo. They were quite enthralled by the whole thing! We had a great time staying in a low budget, back to nature camp, eating what the students planned and created! It was quite wonderful and interesting food.

### **EVERYDAY – A NEW ETHICAL DILEMMA**

Connie:

I wanted to tell you about one of my students. I'm sure I've mentioned him before. His name is Geoffrey. He's one of the guys that we took up to see his wife on one of our outings. His wife's name is Joyce and she is a real sweetheart.

A few days ago I was asking Geoffrey when he was going home (we were about to begin Easter Holiday). He said that he was going the next morning, but he was still waiting for his wife to send him transport money. I asked how the others made it home. He said that their parents sent them bus money.

Joyce teaches and he wasn't sure if she had gotten paid (from the government) yet. He had to wait for this bus money before he could go home to his family. Mervyn (another student) teaches and lives right near him, about 3 doors down. They were both waiting and couldn't afford the bus.....after all it was K250. That is less than \$2.50!!!! For crying out loud!!!! I asked myself. Why do I get to be the rich American? Why do I have \$2.50 laying around in change on the counter or my kids have 10 times that in their piggy banks or wallets?

He has four children of his own. He takes care of his little sister and his wife's too, I think. They also have others they care for including a girl whose Muslim dad beats her and her mother because they are Christians.

Sooooo THIS is the guy, this one who takes care of all these children with the nothing he gets paid (\$50 per month) who has to wait for 250 kwacha to go continue taking care of them. And I, on the other hand.....we won't get into what I waste.....or make.....or give.....Like Rodrigo says, "Everyday there is a new ethical dilemma."

### **OPENAIR AT THE MARKET**

As we have mentioned before, the faculty are all assigned a group of students to transport on Outreach Day to a particular ministry. I was traveling with the Kuchere Prison group but got switched to driving the bus for the Openair group. This group travels to a different market each week, spends a few minutes singing, then preaching, then meeting with anyone who wants to talk about the Bible.

This week we traveled to the market in Mkauma. Immediately when we arrived, traveling much of the way by raised dirt roads as is most common leading to villages, a little boy about 4 years old began tailing me. His name is Ishmail and likely from a Muslim family. Most of the market shops are run by Muslims and are many times members of the Yao tribe. They are uneducated generally.

He mostly stood and watched me while I listened passively to the preaching (which was in Chichewa and therefore I catch about one word every two sentences, if that). At one point he was hanging on a branch that was used as a support for one of the little market booths right at my side. A little girl, a bit older, came up and began pushing him away from the branch. I was at a loss but said at one point, to no avail, "iye" meaning "no". After taking this treatment for some time Ishmail began crying, making no sound. I moved to another spot by another support and told him to come over. He did and began hanging on the support and staring once again at me!

Following the preaching, one of the students came to get me as they were talking with a young woman who had a child at her side. She was interested in knowing more about Christianity. She was a Muslim, but she explained her husband did "not pray".

The student told me she was having family problems. He asked if he should delve into her private life. I said he could certainly ask if she wanted to talk about it. She explained that there were problems with her husband.

I asked if he beat her (which is very common here). I was a bit surprised by her response. She told us that she was the second wife to her husband. He had two wives and things weren't too ducky!

This is the first time I have actually talked to someone involved in polygamy and was at a loss as to what to suggest the students tell her. I told the student that we don't deal with this issue in the United States!

After we returned to ABC the student told me that where he comes from, the Ngoni tribal chiefs commonly have 4 or more wives. He had recently been dealing with a man who had become a Christian and had 3 wives and did not know what to do. Some have suggested that they continue to care for all the wives and commit to one as THE wife, if you know what I mean!

All those passages regarding more than one wife in the Bible all of a sudden have come to life!

By God's Grace,  
Kelly

## **June 6, 2004**

Dear Friends,

I imagine this will be the last "in" Malawi "African Update". We leave in one week, stopping over for three nights in London to rest and see some museums! We will return to Wyoming on June 17.

Graduation was a real capping of this incredibly diverse year with representation from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, the President of Children of the Nations, the Coordinator for the Department of Teacher Development of Malawi, and the Deputy Ambassador to the United States Embassy.

If you have read these book-length letters you know we have had the experience of our lives and will certainly never forget it. For two days (yesterday was Graduation) there has been a steady stream of goodbyes...not easy as it is unlikely that we will see any of these students again.

### **EATING DESSERT**

Recently we began asking the freshman students when they have lunch with us if they have ever had "dessert" before. Quite a number of them have not! Madalitso said he had never had a dessert after a meal in his life.

Guise could not remember the first time he had a dessert and what it was. When he was ten years old his mother and father learned how to make a cake type dessert and served it. He told Connie later that, "This has been the greatest day of my life. I will remember this day until the day I die!" At dinner in the dining hall that night he said he was going to give his plate of food to Miriam (who showed up late and the food ran out) because he didn't want to spoil the lunch!

### **AFRICAN ENTRAPANUERS**

While in Zambia we had a discussion with Manda, our safari guide, regarding economic development in Zambia and Malawi. In that America does not have it all together and Malawi is in the same boat, the discussion centered on what positive influences could America's economic acumen have on Africa and what are the pitfalls.

It is evident that the African "community" plays a major role in the economic landscape. What America has is a competitive spirit, an "I can do better than that one" kind of perspective that we recoil at the mention. However, that competitiveness drives a market economy that continues to grow and produce greater and greater comforts and life saving products (a bit of laziness as well).

The African community provides for one another and a family member who fails to care for his entire extended family when he has even the slightest wealth – a bit more than the others – is worse than the worst! But, according to Manda, those who achieve are also ostracized for trying to be “better than everyone else”.

Man clearly does not quite understand the balance of doing work with skill, enjoying wealth if created by that work, and building up those who achieve the same or greater things in their work.

Our new gardener, Felix, has fallen into a new business. While he was helping Connie shop a few weeks ago she pointed out a shaker (musical) in a store that was being sold for nearly \$10 – a lot for around here. They were catering to expatriates like us who will fall for anything. She told Felix to try making one. He made three for us! Taking old pieces of hose, a branch, spokes from a beat up umbrella and a knife, he fashioned quite a useable shaker instrument.

Connie, knowing a good business when she sees one, took the shakers into Bible Study and immediately took advance orders of 18! Like I said, expatriates are gullible! Since then he has made all his transport money for two months from short term mission folks visiting.

### **EMMA’S WEDDING**

Emma, who is Sylvester’s daughter (Chinchen’s cook) in January announced her engagement to Raphael and asked Janelle to be her Junior Bride. It has been several months of excitement for Janelle in addition to being a thrill for us to look forward to our first Malawian wedding.

At about 4:40 on Friday (day before) I took Janelle to the rehearsal at the ABC gym. Paul met me there and led me to the church where we began over an hour late. The girls (college and various workers) have been so sweet to Janelle and took wonderful care of her during the rehearsal.

After the arranger had talked the various individuals through the process we had to move out of the church as there was a Mass about to begin. My car was only one of two vehicles there and so we piled everyone in like a mini-bus and headed back to campus. I was told to be at the church with Janelle at 8:30 AM.

The time of the wedding changed up until Friday night. Paul Chinchen mentioned the time change (1 hour earlier – 9 AM) at the campus potluck dinner when Janelle and I returned from the rehearsal. No one happened to mention it at the rehearsal!

I had thought that the Junior Bride showing up at 8:30 was plenty of time before a wedding an hour and a half later, but ½ hour? However, as we prepared to leave at 8:20 AM, I called Paul as someone had called us earlier and we missed the call. He suggested that we leave at 10 minutes to 9!

So, we were on our way at 8:50 arriving at about 9 and there was one person there from the wedding party...and no congregation! At 9:10 we videotaped the sanctuary to show that there were about 10 people there and the bride had just arrived!

The Irish Catholic priest (Patrick of course) is a wonderful man. We had a great time talking to him about Malawi and Ireland...he has been here about 15 years. He said that in Ireland it is common for the bride to arrive quite late to keep the groom guessing.

The singing and dancing during the ceremony was a real kick! The whole wedding party dances down the aisle and the choir sings during nearly every little section of the ceremony. When the couple is duly married, the whole congregation proceeds up the center aisle, dancing and greeting the new Mr. and Mrs. who are sitting at the altar.

Following the wedding everyone jumped in a very small number of vehicles including a couple small busses provided by the couple to travel to the reception. After the couple had received counseling by family members on marital affairs at a house on campus and a luncheon for the wedding party, the almost 6 hour long reception began in the ABC gym.

The primary focus of the reception at many Malawian weddings is the raising of funds for the new couple. An Emcee is “hired”, usually a friend or family member, who will get people to dig deep. The process is the calling on various groups of people to come forward and throw money in a collection basket. Everyone either comes with lots of small change (5 to 10 Kwacha bills = 5 to 10 cents) or gets change from the “bankers” who count the money as the Emcee collects.

The couple mans the collection basket or the parents of the couple or the employer...with the Emcee blaring away at the crowd to come forward with their money. He collected money as votes at one point for the couple to kiss. It lost by 9 Kwacha supposedly so the couple settled for a quick “peck” on the lips. It was the first time we had seen any real display of affection in Malawi other than a very small amount of holding hands.

As the crowd presses forward a band is playing – hired for about \$70 for the whole afternoon – and everyone is dancing. It is such a wild affair...never have we sat through anything like it. We arrived home at 6:15 PM thoroughly exhausted and ready to go to bed having started the whole process at 8:50 AM.

### **CONCLUSION**

We hope that we will see you all soon. As I cannot possibly keep my mouth shut, you will probably be hearing an update one last time when we return. Thank you for your encouragement and prayers. We look forward to hearing your stories!!!

By God’s Grace,  
Kelly and Connie

### **QUOTES**

Daniel (in Shea’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Class): When asked on a paper, “What will you do when you are 100 years old?” He wrote, “I would do some helping around and I would do baby seeter and I would do som resting in peace.”

## **July 15, 2004**

Dear Friends,

We have been back in the United States for one month and are finally starting to see the end of the boxes. We had one room stacked to the ceiling with our stuff that we had left but put away while our house was rented.

We came home to a house painted, cleaned, repaired and stocked with food. Connie’s parents, aunt and uncle, and my parents had spent 2 months working on it preparing our mansion for our return! In addition, our church family had cleaned out their own cupboards to stock ours! We were so incredibly relieved to walk into a house ready for our unpacking.

Our trip home went quite smoothly despite VISA’s inability to follow our movements. While in London – we are writing a pamphlet on “How to do London on 10 English Pounds and a credit card – VISA became concerned about the sudden use of our card half way around the world. We had to make two calls while trying to charge things and surf their security (failing during one of the calls) to regain use of it, our only source of money!

It has been great to be back to the foods we are used to, moving about freely, and seeing family and friends once again. It is very easy to fall into self induced guilt over all we have here in the United States and when we do it gives us one more opportunity to think through the issue of “haves and have nots” that we spent all year dealing with.

One of our goals upon return has been to pass on convictions that we think are worth sharing! As people ask how they can most help the “plight” of the Africans we are trying to be as balanced in our response as possible as there are many things that we can do with our wealth that can help...and hinder.

There seem to be two approaches to working for change in Malawi; the needs of day to day living among orphans and the poor in general and training that will have long term effects on those particular issues. The “balance” comes when considering that both things are very important as people’s needs “today” must be met before there is a tomorrow! But, long term impact on those circumstances sometimes comes through other means than meals and clothes.

Trying not to be too biased, we are sold on the importance of institutions like African Bible College for the second approach. The Malawi government really only recognizes degrees from the University of Malawi and ABC for its primary jobs. The students, armed with a degree from ABC, have incredible opportunities to shape the thinking and policy in every area of Malawian politics, church life, and business realm. They are the future and, in some cases, current leaders in Malawi. A dollar goes a long way at ABC as all the foreign faculty are on support they have raised leaving all the funds at ABC for facilities, programs, and student tuition reduction.

There were a number of organizations that are run by quality Malawian directors that are doing the day to day, “grass roots” work with orphans and poverty. Fletcher, who I have written about before, developed “Ministry of Hope” with several orphan feeding centers. In addition, an American founded organization called “Children Of The Nations” is providing orphanages (that are more like large families) with a small budget and incredible impact.

### **ONE LAST THANKS**

We really appreciated your support over this past year. I have to say that the impact the Malawians and ABC folks had on us was of far greater worth than we had on them. We are more than thankful that we “fell” into this endeavor and hope that some of you will consider this kind of break from the American way of life sometime in your future!

By God’s Grace,  
Kelly, Connie, Brit, Joel, Shea, and Janelle

## January, 2005

It has been over six months since we returned to the comfort of our home in Lander, Wyoming, USA. Not a single day has passed for some of us that we haven't thought about Malawi. Questions continually arise regarding where home should be for the Dehnert family. We know that we have learned to be "*discontent* in whatever situation we are in"...a *very* loose translation of Philippians 4:11.

We have learned that we want to talk about Africa all the time (and do); we have learned that our lives are forever changed in the most extraordinary ways; and we have learned that no one can truly understand it unless they have been there. It is very hard for us to keep our mouths shut, yet our perspective on the American existence is radically altered! It is no longer so simple to hold the "party line" on many issues. We are offended by attitudes towards the rest of the world that we never thought could possibly be challenged by "thinking" people. The solutions tend to be neither "liberal" nor "conservative" in many cases.

And, finally we no longer believe that this world is our home. We belong to a heavenly kingdom that cannot be shaken and this world is very, very far from it. We are thankful that God has so chosen to shed His love abroad in our hearts and that His Son would be willing to shed His blood to cover our sins and no town, state, country or world should hold our hearts like His land...not even the *Warm Heart of Africa*.