

Malawi Girls on the Move

AT ATSIKANA PA ULENDO

GIRLS ON THE MOVE

ATSIKANA PA ULENDO

News

January 2007

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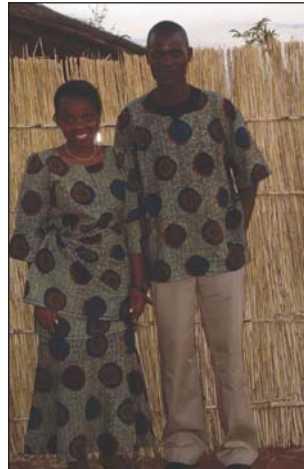
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APU Malawi Progress Report

by Christie Johnson

Every so often you encounter someone with a dream so gripping and convincing, you resolve to help make it come true. When Memory first told me about her dream to open her own Secondary School for girls, she was still a university student with another year to go before completing her degree. Now, just two years later, she has graduated from university, has her first teaching job, is happily married to Henry Mdyetseni, and is expecting her first child in May!



Henry and Memory during their engagement party

Despite the many changes in Memory's life over the past year, she is still bound and determined to make her dream come true. She and Henry (engineer) are using their evenings and weekends, as well as their holiday time to move the project forward. They have managed to have the land surveyed, hire an architect to begin designing the buildings and put together a Board of Trustees consisting of a

Henry, Memory and Christie on the land where the school will be built.



lawyer, an accountant, an education specialist with experience working with NGO's and a woman (a rotarian from the Lilongwe Club) involved with Peace Corps. They are now in the middle of the complex paperwork required for registering the land and having their name, APU (Atsikana Pa Uleno or Girls On The Move) incorporated.

The sign, indicating the site for the APU School



APU Canada Progress Report

While Memory and Henry have been working in Malawi, I have been extremely busy here in Canada, working to put in place an organization that will support the fundraising needed to get this school built. I have had incredible support from many Rotarians who have heard me speak at their Rotary Clubs and who have

become extremely committed to this project. With their help, we have formed an Advisory Committee called APU Canada. This Committee has two branches, one in Victoria, B.C (where I currently live and teach) and the other in Edmonton, Alberta, where this project originated. With the help of these com-

mittees, we have managed to produce a brochure, letterhead, donation forms, our own website: <www.malawigirlsonthefirstmove.com> as well as a comprehensive Project/Business Plan. We have the ability to give tax receipts to our donors as well as receive donations in kind for marketable securities.

OUR STUDENTS NEED SPONSORS!!

I continue to seek as many speaking opportunities as possible at Rotary meetings, schools and other community events. Our immediate goal is to find 80 clubs and/or individuals who are willing to sponsor our first intake of girls. A full scholarship costs \$ 1,000 per year for four years, which is \$ 85.00 per month. This scholarship will pay the tuition, room and board, uniform, book fees and examination for one girl for her entire 4 years of Secondary School. In addition, approximately \$ 400 of every \$ 1,000 scholarship will be put into the construction of classrooms and hostels required for our next intake of 80 girls.

The school will be built in four phases, with each phase being completed prior to the next year's intake of 80 students. **If you or anyone you know might be interested in sponsoring one of our girls, please direct them to our website at www.malawigirlsonthefirstmove.com or e-mail us at support@malawigirlsonthefirstmove.com**



OUR SCHOOL NEEDS BRICKS

The first three buildings need to be completed by January 2008 for the first intake of 80 students (2 classrooms of 40 students each).

Classroom Block	\$	20,000
Girls Hostel	\$	50,000
Staff House	\$	20,000

To complete these initial construction projects, we will need approximately \$ 90,000.

If you, your family, school, business or anyone you know is interested in helping us achieve our construction goals, please see our **Brick by Brick Schoolhouse Project**

at www.malawigirlsonthefirstmove.com under the "How You Can Help" link. We are literally building this school brick by brick and invite you to be part of this effort. You would be amazed at how many bricks a single dollar can purchase.

Sustainability

The ultimate goal of this project is to see this school become fully independent and sustainable. This is a locally driven project with local leadership. Our involvement here in Canada is simply that of funding the construction and initial scholarships until the school is in a position to take on paying students. Once construction is complete, the student body will consist of half of the students paying full tuition, one quarter on partial scholarships and the final quarter on full scholarships. The scholarships will be given to the students by the APU School itself.

Our original 22 Sponsored Girls

It has been too long since I have given an update about our first 22 girls and, of course, their lives have changed greatly over the past two years. This past summer, during my fifth return to Malawi, I did manage to meet with almost all of the girls.

Many of you have sponsored these girls for portions of their Secondary Schooling and/or their Business Loans and you must be eager to hear news about their progress.

Lilongwe girls: Enala, Salomy, Anna, Monica and Memory.

Last year during my visit, these five girls

were truly working as a team, pooling their loans and contributing their profits from their various businesses (chickens, Tailoring, Phone Shop) to pay for their rent, food and business expenses. This summer however, it became apparent that this was not working for the girls and I helped them split up their remaining loans so that each of them was independently responsible for their own bank account.

As it stands now, there are still 5 of the original 6 girls living together in the same house in Lilongwe but

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now they are responsible for their own money and contributing equal shares to the rent of the house. **Monica and Memory** have jobs as secretaries in the city and are managing to make enough money to pay for their rent, food, bus transport into town, as well as saving a bit each month to pay back their original loan. They are also sending small amounts of money to their families in the village, which helped them to stash away extra food during the famine, so that they didn't feel the full force of the famine. They have truly achieved self sufficiency! Both girls are in relationships with young men that are educated and employed.

Anna Banda and Salomy Kamanga are both trained tailors and are continuing to earn money by sewing clothes for customers that come to the house.

Their customers bring the material and choose their pattern, usually a dress or a skirt for the girls to sew. They leave their material with the girls and come back a week later to pay for their finished product. One of the challenges the girls continually face is that



often they end up sewing clothes that are never collected by the customer.

This

means they have poured many hours into sewing and their labour is never reimbursed. To increase their profits, these girls have opened a nursery school and kindergarten in the house they are renting. They have become incredibly busy, with up to 50 young children in the house at a time. Anna teaches English to the older children in one room and Salomy and Enala take turns caring for the younger children (6 months to 4 years in one for the bedrooms of the house).

Enala Mwale is working with Salomy and Anna, helping them care for the children as well as run a small "Tuck Shop" outside in the yard. Her idea is to sell candies, soap, lotion and basic food such as eggs and oil to the parents when they come to pick up their children from the nursery school.

Enala is having a tough time with her business as she finds that there are times she must leave the tuck shop to care for the children and when she comes back, her goods have been stolen.

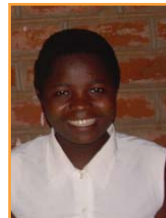
The best news from the girls doesn't actually come from their success as business women, rather, it is the news they are sharing with me about their relationships with their boyfriends. This summer during my visit, all three of these girls had boyfriends. Now I hear that all three girls have broken up with their boyfriends because they have discovered that they, the young men, were seeing other women at the same time. The girls had to be very strong in order to break off their relationships. In fact **Salomy** actually had to stay in the house for over a month for fear of physical abuse from her ex-boyfriend who was very angry with her.

Excerpt from Enala Mwale's letter

to Christie on Dec 12, 2006

"I separated with Owen in September because he didn't want to have his blood tested for HIV and some people told me that he had another girlfriend beside me. Last month-end I fell in love with Charles (a policeman) a long time friend of mine and last Monday we went for a blood test and he is HIV negative! He is an honest man since I have known him I hope you will be able to meet him. His English is also better than Owen's.

That's the only good news I have for now !!!



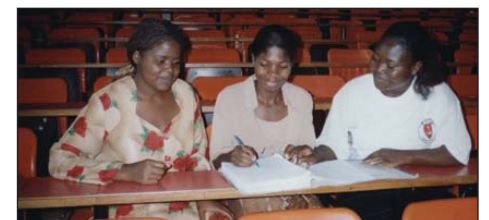
Beatrice had a tough couple of years but I am incredibly happy to say that she has come out of a very dark hole and is back on track. When I arrived in Malawi this summer, I discovered that Beatrice had just given birth to twins. In fact, she went into labour just three days before she was to write her final examinations at the Natural Resources College. She had kept her pregnancy a secret from Memory and I because she didn't want to disappoint us. Memory and I traveled all the way to Blantyre by minibus, rented bicycle and finally by foot to the village that she was staying in with her newborn



twins. We were terribly saddened to see what had become of our strong, ambitious and determined Beatrice. She was so close to having her diploma and an assured job as an agricultural outreach worker with the Government. Instead, she was living with her boyfriend (a gentle, shy and very nice young man with a diploma from NRC) in a one room soil house with her very small, quite sick twins. As a daughter in law, she was responsible for cooking for her husband's entire extended family twice a day, as well as caring for her newborns. In addition, Beatrice's mother-in-law was pressuring Beatrice to have a local traditional medicine man come to remove the curse that had caused her to have twins. Memory and I left 10,000 Kwacha with Beatrice as extra insurance in case one or both of the twins were to get sick, and we said goodbye to the little family, feeling sick at heart. The good news is that Beatrice managed to make her way to Lilongwe to write her exams in November. She has passed and she and her husband both had job interviews. Beatrice is now working on a business proposal and has plans to start her own farm. Her education has stood her in good stead and Memory and I are very proud of her.

Sellina Malaga, Mary Chakwawa, and Witness Kamanga

All three of these girls are now well into their third year of studies at Bunda College in Lilongwe. They are all becoming stronger students with each semester that passes, with Mary leading the group in terms of marks and Sellina and Witness following closely behind. All three girls are in B.Sc. programs



and will graduate in May of 2008. Sellina has been seeing Morroco, (Memory Chazeza's Cousin) for nearly 4 years and the two of them plan to marry after Sellina has completed her education. Morroco is working towards a diploma in Theology with plans of pursuing a law degree, once Sellina is finished her B.Sc. Morroco has been a great help to Memory and Henry, spending many hours sewing dolls, overseeing the firing of bricks and serving as a watchman at the APU school site.

Gweneth Sakala



Gwen has had a bit of a hole to climb out of over the past year due to the poor behavior of her father. When Gwen first was accepted into Chancellor's College in 2004, I

wired her tuition money directly to the registrar of the college. Somehow, her father managed to convince the registrar to withdraw the money and hand it over to him. Mr. Sakala then loaned the money out at high interest rates to the various teachers on his staff and when it came time for Gwen to go to school, she was told that her money was no longer at the College. Gwen was devastated. Memory and I found Mr. Sakala, who was attempting to hide from us, and demanded the money back. Mr. Sakala asked us for two weeks in which to collect the money and did manage to get almost 3/4 of the money from the teachers to give back to us. We then helped Gwen to enroll in the University of Mzuzu in a B.A degree. Although Gwen did lose a year to this fiasco, she has managed to complete 1.5 years at Mzuzu College. Last summer she told me that she has decided that she really wants to be a teacher. She has completed a teaching practicum and was extremely successful with the students she was working with. She absolutely loves it and is excited by the possibility that she might one day be able to teach at ATSIKANA PA ULENDU.!

YOUNGER BUSINESS GIRLS

The remaining 11 girls were each given their business loans of 30,000 Kwacha (\$300.00 CAD) this summer. Memory and I met with each girl independently and went over the business proposals that they had prepared. If Memory and I were convinced that the girls had done research, and if we felt that their idea had merit and a possibility of working, we went with them to the bank to help them set up their account and transferred their loan into the account. Each girl has now signed a Business Contract and has received their loan.



Chirstie helps Chikondi and Margaret sign their contract.

Part of their loan agreement is that they must communicate with Memory and I once every two months, handing in a comprehensive business report describing their financial situation and some of the challenges that they are facing. When I read their reports I find it difficult not to jump on a plane and go and rescue them. They truly have no alternative than to stand on their own two feet! Some of the girls have already started their various businesses and three of them, **Chikondi, Iness and Margaret** have followed in the older girls footsteps and are opening their own nursery schools at trading centers near the home villages.



Nyuma

Tabitha, Nyuma, Sallah and Ceceilah are making good use of their tailoring skills and have each opened their own tailoring shops. These younger girls are experiencing the growing pains of starting their own businesses and have yet to begin making any profit, but Memory and I are hopeful that as they gain experience they will find their way just as the older girls have done before them

Excerpt from Sallah's Business Report

"From September to November things were not good because at that time I had no customers. However, things have changed because I have got something to attract customers to my business. I have started sewing baby carriers and baby bags. I managed to buy the materials for the baby carriers and bags last month. First, I made a sample and after some time people were attracted to what I had made. Since that time I concentrated on making what customers wanted. I believe in the saying "nothing is impossible" and I can say that with hope I will make it up and through my vision everything is possible with my hands. In this month of January I am expected to make 20 baby carriers for the market. If all goes well am expected to have K10,000.00. As I have already narrated that things were not going on well last year, because I was new in this business. Yes, I am a tailor but was not business oriented. I have learned from last year and I hope to improve on my weaknesses this year. Apart from making baby carriers, close to my shop somebody has opened a school where by I would love to negotiate with the owner that I provide them with school uniforms".





Tabitha is a wonderful little seamstress, however her shy and quiet nature makes it difficult for her to deal with customers. She has been taken advantage of by customers, her own brother (who convinced her to go into business with him and then

took all her profits), and even her friends Nyuma and Ceceliah. Tabitha is living at home with her parents and is currently applying for jobs.

Esthery is working as a General Fitter (metal work) with the Alliance One Tobacco Company in Lilongwe and is living on her own in a rented apartment.



She came perilously close to getting married to the wrong boy last summer but with Memory's guidance she has broken the relationship and is truly thriving on her own.

Ruth has opened a restaurant in Kasungu in partnership with her sister-in-law. Their restaurant is thriving and Ruth is able to pay for her own food and rent



as well as send money home to her family in the village. This past summer I was thrilled to be able to go with each of these girls to witness and photograph them outside of the Opportunity Bank where they were able to take out a bank account in their own names.



Chikondi is renting a small house at the trading center near her village. She has opened a nursery school and has 20 children enrolled but is finding it difficult to make

any profits because often the parents are unable to pay their bills. She doesn't have the heart to send children away so ends up with very few paying students.

Our final two girls have both been successful in finding jobs in towns and are staying with extended family members to cut their cost of living.



Benia is working at the Chirani Pharmacy in Kasungu as a sales clerk.

Maness is working with a community clinic in Chamama, as an accountant.

In order for these girls to become employed they have to compete with hundreds of well trained, mostly male applicants. Memory Chazeza and I are extremely proud of these girls who have managed to access job information, put together a resume, fill out application forms, travel independently to job interviews, and present themselves to an interviewing committee.

My Malawi Experience

Trip Diary,
October 31 November 8, 2006, Malawi
by Tricia Timmermans

In November, after taking part in polio immunizations in Ethiopia and visiting Rotary projects in South Africa, Victoria-based Rotarians Colleen Milne (West Shore) and I, Tricia Timmermans (Oak Bay) flew to Lilongwe where we were met by Memory and Henry and Memory's cousin Morocco. The first item on the list of activities was to obtain estimates for a well to be drilled in Memory's grandfather's village - a short distance from Lilongwe. This well was funded (\$4,000) by West Shore Rotary Club. In a very short time, Henry had organized the completion of this task and as of Christmas Day, women in this village no longer have to make the two-hour, twice-daily trek to collect water—water that was barely potable. This was an excellent precursor to what is possible (with Henry's help) at APU. We visited a day care project being run by Enala, Anna and Salomy, three girls from Christie's microcredit program. Here, children were being cared for in a very basic, unfurnished house



Anna Banda Teaching Kindergarten

for which the girls pay 8000MKW (Kwacha) per month. Two sewing machines which Salomy uses in her tailoring business stood along one wall. Mattresses on the floor provided sleeping accommodation for the girls; there were no desks, no tables, no refrigerator, one coal-burning cooker, and a few plastic bowls in a bucket. There were neither toys nor anything that would

remotely identify the building as a daycare centre - just the little children - who eagerly accepted our stickers. They were well-dressed and happily sang songs for us as they sat on a straw-mat-covered floor.

After much driving to and from Lilongwe to locate and price items for an APU office (in Memory and Henry's home in Area 25), we purchased a desk, a printer, a USB cable, a surge protector and an optical mouse, with money donated by members of the Rotary Club of Oak Bay.

A very bumpy, dusty, long (a damaged bridge meant a 20 kilometer detour had to be taken) drive, past attractive but parched tobacco estates, brought us to Henry's village. Henry's lovely mother was unfortunately stricken with a malaria attack and was far from well. Nearby we were treated to some rather unusual animist dancing. The dancers wore horrific masks and were more than a little scary as they swarmed our car singing like lunatics in a threatening manner. Apparently it was all in fun. Accompanied by Henry's father, we visited the school where he teaches. We met here many of the girls who could be future APU candidates. They sang beautifully for us. Henry gave them a fairly stirring chat on the benefits of education and on the dangers of going too soon into marriage. We were appalled at the conditions of the building where 22 of the girls live - the school is too far away from their homes to travel each day.

Next stop in our rented Honda CRV 4-wheel-drive vehicle was the site where bricks were being made by a young man named Frank. He explained the process of drying them in a wood-fired kiln.

The APU site was approximately 800 meters from the brick-making site, hence funds are



Colleen Milne with Henry and Memory by the bricks on the school land.

needed to transport them. So far they've used a tractor as transport, but this is fairly expensive. After a short drive along a rutted strip, we came across the large APU sign. In the distance



we could see a high, lengthy pile of bricks along the perimeter of the site. It was here that I convinced some cheeky little boys to sing their National Anthem for me - the transformation from naughty to nice, complete with hands demurely resting on chests, was something I won't forget.

The following day we drove on the highway for two hours to Kasungu, then onto Memory's grandfather's village along dry, rutted, stony roads. Here we were part of a huge celebration - the women danced for hours - in a ceremony where Colleen presented the village with the "funds" (they had already been deposited into a bank account) to dig a well. We said goodbye to Morocco, Memory's cousin, who we had grown to know and admire over the few short days we had spent with him. On the way home from the village, we drove to Kamuzu Academy, described by its proponents as the Eton of Africa. Latin and Greek are compulsory subjects, but strangely, there's no Chichewa! Henry and Memory were in awe as we drove (accompanied by a gate guard who hopped into the car) past its man-made lake and through the impeccable grounds of this Tweed Curtain anomaly, where Malawi's rich-men's children don boaters and blazers and receive a jolly good education. We wound up our Malawi meandering at Lake Malawi in the Livingstonia Hotel on Senga Bay, just past Salima, which is about 125 kilometers from the capital. For two days we sunned, swam, played games, watched movies, ate well, and drank tasty Malawi beer. We needed the break, but it wasn't over yet. Our last day in Lilongwe was fruitful. We

attended the Lilongwe Rotary Club meeting where we exchanged banners and made a few excellent connections. Jeanne Mosier is the wife of the head of the Malawi Peace Corps; they are newly arrived from Denver, CO, and Jeanne has recently joined the Lilongwe Club. Since we left, Jeanne has met several times with Henry and Memory and is proving to be a good support and Rotary liaison. Others we met were an architect, a project accountant, and a lawyer experienced in land registration. All promised to help with the project. Later we visited the Canada High Commission where we made several contacts including: Robert Foote, the Director of Program support for



Memory with the President of the Rotary Club of Lilongwe

Malawi-Canada, and a Gender specialist;

James Mambulu, a water and sanitation specialist who strongly recommended a sanitation review in the village. Macpherson (Mac) Jere, is an education specialist. with thirty years experience in Malawi at all levels. He has served on the board of directors of the ABC school and sounded willing to discuss all aspects of the school project including curriculum development, certification, and teacher qualifications. He indicated he might serve as a board member for APU Malawi.

Both Colleen and I wish to thank Henry and Memory, and their families and friends, for their friendship and support during our stay in Malawi.

Tricia Timmermans
PR Director Rotary Club of Oak Bay
www.oakbayrotary.com

Donations of Marketable Securities

APU Canada and our students in Malawi would be sincerely grateful for your donation of marketable securities. This tax-efficient approach is available without charge for gifts of one full scholarship of \$4,000 or greater. For more information please refer to our web site: www.malawigirlsonthemove.com