

SYLE-VOLUNTEER' - INTERNATIONAL SERVAS PROGRAMME - REPORT

By Marian Mandeville Saturday: 11th May– 6th July 2013

Australia to Blantyre, Malawi, Africa.

PRE-SYLE-VOUNTEER PREPARTATION:

- I first learn about this programme after reading an article in my Servas Australian Newsletter.
- I have always wanted to come to Africa and I thought, this is my chance to finally go. I found Malawi on an African map. Yes!
- I contacted Demelza, the National Secretary in Malawi and we got the ball rolling.
- I didn't realize in the beginning that there were three stages to go through and got the feeling I was applying for some top job. However it made sense at the end as Malawi Servas wanted to play it as safe as possible and wanted to get a clear picture of the person they were going to take responsibility for.

TRAVEL & ARRIVAL ✈:

I flew out of Brisbane and arrived in Blantyre about 30 hours later. Shattered. It took forever to get through customs because they seem to have a lot of trouble with their new computer system. Servas people outside thought I'd missed the plane!

SYLE PROGRAMME:

The SYLE programme for me consisted of three parts.

- 1st: Visiting and staying with hosts for two weeks.
- 2nd: Working as a volunteer for 2 weeks each at two different places
- 3rd: Two weeks sightseeing.



MY HOSTS: The first 2 weeks I visited 7 hosts, staying with each host 2 nights. The idea was to give Malawi Servas hosts an experience of hosting because very few Servas people visit Malawi and some of the hosts had never hosted before. For me it was a wonderful experience to stay with so many different families. They were all great and very hospitable hosts who showed me many things as you can see below! Over 1 weekend I stayed with 2 hosts and then 2 more when I travelled to the Thyolo and Liwonde.

SATURDAY 11th	SUNDAY 12th	MONDAY 13th	TUESDAY 14th	WEDNESDAY 15th	THURS 16th
<p><i>Arrived in Blantyre</i></p> <p>HOST- Demelza</p>	<p>Stayed at Demelza's house and hiked up Nyambadwe Hill and afterwards had a nice lunch at Blantyre sports club.</p>	<p>Host No 1 Laurette and Kerone I stayed with my first host Their house and garden was very beautiful big and spacious. I had very tasty, lovely meals. They spoiled me.</p>	<p>It was a Bank holiday and we visited an Uncle in the countryside. We walked around and I saw for the first time the hustle bustle of little stalls on the road side. Very lively. In the afternoon we visited Open Arms Infant Home.</p>	<p>Host No 2 Hannah and Chris Hannah and I and her 2 year old son visited some nice cafés e.g. La Caverna. I had my first Chichewa lesson</p>	<p>We had a walk and some lunch at Fisherman's Rest in Chikwawa. All very pleasant.</p>
FRIDAY 17th	SATURDAY 18th	SUNDAY 19th	MONDAY 20th	<p>↓ ME being me.</p>	<p>Local child↓</p>
<p>Host No 3 Janet Fanny my Chichewa teacher and I met up. At night we had a Servas get together where I met some of my hosts and I showed my PP presentations. Everyone seemed to enjoy them and then we watched a film about Mary's meals. A pleasant evening</p>	<p>Janet and I went to a coffee shop and in the evening we saw a Play near her house in a little open air theatre called Nanzikambe. The theatre company is sponsored by a German organisation. The actors get a monthly salary. Not many people turned up.</p>	<p>Host No 4 Linda Quiet morning and got picked up around lunchtime by Linda</p>	<p>Linda works for a Church organization. We visited a church in a village. The church was also used as a day care center for children between 2 and 4. My first experience with village life. A real eye opener.</p>		
TUESDAY 21th	WEDNESDAY 26th	THURSDAY 27th	FRIDAY 28	SATURDAY 28th	Sunday 29th
<p>Host No 5 Macheza Stayed with Macheza his mother and grandmother. They live in a beautiful big house with a very large garden. We drove to the Shire river in Chikawa... Very nice view from the bridge.</p>	<p>Machewa's mother showed me around the medical faculty where she is head of the pharmacy department. In the afternoon we had a good walk in a nature reserve. A shame we didn't see many animals, except for some monkeys on the road.</p>	<p>Host No 6 Henry I stayed one night with Henry and his family, because Henry had to go to Lilongwe very early in the morning and it would have been difficult to drop me off. Henry, his 2 children and I visited the Museum, which was interesting</p>	<p>Host No 7 Shamaela Shamaela picked me up from Shoprite and I stayed with her family for 3 nights. Not that long ago they bought a house and Shamela has renovated it from top to bottom Needless to say it looks very impressive with a very artistic gate.</p>	<p>Shaemela, her 2 children and I visited a simple mosque. Moslem children go there to learn about their religion. At her home she had prepared a lot of food for the children who all got fed. I wore a habib for the first time.</p>	<p>Besides being given very tasty meals at her home, I was taken to a family barbecue and a nice restaurant.,</p>



Out for lunch with Linda+her Uncle



Childccare Centre with Linda



Lunch at Fishermans Rest with Hannah



Shire River afternoon with Macheza .



Museum with Henryry.



With Shamaela feeding at mosque.



Children outsider Janets.

30th May – 7th June : FIRST PLACEMENT: Working with the MWAI TRUST. Volunteer and staying with Sandra Trevethan

Sandra has set up the Mwayi Trust project. Which sets up homework centres in rural areas.

Sandra lives in a great house outside Blantyre with a million dollar view from her patio. The road towards her place however is pretty horrendous. It is good that she owns a car made for such conditions.

The first week Sandra and I visited three secondary schools, which are involved with the Mwayi trust project, and a primary school. I was shocked. The classrooms are substandard, overcrowded with inadequate desks. There is nothing for the students and no resources for the teachers. They don't have electricity. It is a miracle that the students learn anything. The principles and the teachers were very welcoming and the students were great. The primary school had 1400 students and 10 classrooms. Half of the children were taught outside under some trees. I have never seen such lively and happy children. They get extremely excited if you take photographs and show them the result.

The second week I wrote some activities to support the Malawi Senior Secondary Teaching Syllabus. English Forms 3 and 4. This syllabus was the only booklet I could work from because that was the only thing we could find in the schools. Not a single text book or some type of curriculum was to be found. These children live in rural areas and only speak Chichewa at home. Hence the activities concentrate on the communication skills listening and speaking. With Sandra's help, who did the editing, a booklet was produced in the second week.

We decided that it would be very useful to give a workshop doing all the activities with the English teachers of the schools, which we did a week later and was very successful.

When I applied for the SYLE programme I wanted to work with babies in Open Arms. However Sandra had different ideas after reading my CV and thought I would be more usefully occupied writing activities to support the teaching of communicating in English. I am thankful for that because it was a great experience for me visiting the schools with all the teachers and students and roaring in her truck through the country side. Doing the workshop with Sandra was a lot of fun too and it was good to see that the teachers got a lot out of it and thought it was very helpful.



Teaching Grade 1 to read.



Class room, 'under a tree'.



English teachers from the workshop I ran with Sandra.

9th – 21st June: SECOND PLACEMENT: Teaching at Chichiri prison. Staying with Demelza & Family.

When Demelza and I went to Chichiri prison on Monday June 10th, we discovered that the classroom was used for exams. It was decided that I would teach in the counselling room. However the next day I the counselling room was locked due to exam papers stored in the room. I ended up teaching in the kitchen with only room for 5 women sitting on the floor. I had to give the same lesson 4 times a day in the first week. The condition in the prison is shocking. Only one meal of beans a day is provided. They get locked up in their cells from 4 pm till 6 am and sleep on the cement floor with not enough mats nor blankets. All their needs have to be provided for by their relatives or friends. For the men it is even worse. The prison is built to hold 500 men but there are 1400 prisoners. The cells are so crowded that they can't lay down at night and have to either sit or stand.

Friday 14th June I went and stayed with Sonia McFadden and her family for one night. Then on the Saturday and Sunday I stayed with Kitty a Dutch host & her husband Willie, a Malawian. It was nice to great to speak Dutch again and to eat lovely Dutch cheese. Kitty helped me in several way by driving and helping me buy food for the prisoners on my last day and also coming over to Blantyre to kindly help me do my souvenir shopping '*hartelijke dank*' Kitty!

The idea was that I would try out the activities I compiled for the secondary schools at my previous placement. However that was impossible because the range of English was too spread out, from being totally illiterate to a reasonable knowledge of the English language. I tried to make the classes as entertaining as possible through teaching them simple songs and doing some games. I also brought items to class they might like and use, like soap, milk, tea and biscuits. The last day I brought them each somebody soap and a kilo of sugar, regardless if they attended class or not. I later found out that the staff was not happy about that because I was supposed to give them items too. I did not agree with that because I was there for the prisoners and the staff never did a stitch of work because the women had to do everything. On the last day the women gave me drawings and cards they had made and sang for me. The singing was so much nicer than the songs I had taught them and I was very touched.

I was surprised the whole time how cheery the women were and how much they laughed, living in such miserable circumstances. It was a memorable and very interesting experience for me.

22nd July 3rd July 2013: TWO WEEKS SIGHTSEEING



Me out & about during my 2 weeks holiday – travelling 'local-style' in Malawi.

Let it not be said that Dutch Australians don't know how to use a bike!



On Saturday June 22 I was picked up by a driver who works for Daron, a Servas host who is a manager for a tea estate in Thyolo. I stayed three nights with him and his wife Sha and their 2 children. While I was there I visited the tea plant and went to Game Heaven, an animal park with giraffes and zebras and wild beasts. It is not a nature reserve like Liwonde, because they feed the animals. It also has a golf course and a restaurant The idea is to attract tourists, however I was the only one there. I was toured around for an hour and could walk up close to the giraffes and zebras. I didn't know that a giraffe is such a tall animal. I had only seen pictures of them.

A Dutch guy brought me to my next destination to Mulanje Mountain. I stayed for two nights at Kara O Mula Lodge. A nice place at the foot of the mountain. Mulanji Mountain is unique because once you reach the top you can walk along on the top and climb different peaks. There are 7 huts on the mountain and it would be an interesting place to hike for a couple of days. I only had time for a few walks.

Liwonde Park was my next destination. I would stay with Servas hosts Exton, Thoko and their son in Liwonde village for two nights. I walked to the bus station from Kara O Mula Lodge and started my journey in the minibuses. It took 8 hours and four busses to travel about 120 km to reach Liwonde village. The buses are designed for 12 people but they won't leave till there are 22 people plus luggage stuffed in the bus. The busses have no shock absorbers and you feel every bump and there are lots of them. I was amazed that nobody complained if the driver decided to wait for half an hour to fit another person in. The passengers were mostly joking talking and laughing. I never saw a Westerner near the buses and now I know why. I was absolutely exhausted when I finally arrived. Exten showed me around the hospital the following day where he worked. I was appalled by the terrible conditions. Like the prison the relatives have to provide for the patient's needs. All the patients get is a bed, mostly without any bedding.

I decided to treat myself on a luxurious and expensive outing and booked myself in for a night at Mvuu lodge. The lodge is in the middle of Liwonde Game Park and is reachable by boat departing from Hippos view Lodge.

The trip takes about an hour and you can see elephants, hippos, crocodiles and many birds on the way. When the boat arrived at the lodge I was picked up, while the other passengers went on to the camp. At the Lodge a beautiful lunch was laid out just for me. After lunch I was escorted to my “tent” which interior design was totally from natural products. The lodge belongs to a group called Wilderness Safaris who have Lodges in many game parks in Africa. The place had a king-sized bed very comfortable couches and chairs and a great hot shower. It was surrounded by a deck overlooking a creek from the Shire River with an outside hot shower. That afternoon they organized a sunset safari followed by a night safari to see the animals who live at night. In the morning I was woken up at 5.30 by one of the staff who brought a basket containing a flask with great hot coffee and some biscuits. At six o’clock, someone picked me up to take part in an early morning walk mainly to watch birds and small animals. The morning walk turned into a drive safari followed by a river safari. We stopped at a small side stream where the staff made our breakfast in the boat. It was very special to eat a breakfast in the boat watching the elephants crossing the stream. We saw so many elephants and hippos with their young ones. It all was a real treat. I have never in my life experienced such luxury good taste friendly and helpful staff and paid that much. It was worth it. Also a good experience to find out what money can do. When I wanted to pay I found out that their machine did not accept my visa card. It was decided to drive me for \$30 to Mangochi to use a teller to pay in local currency. In Malawi the money machines all work different. I finally got the money. By that time it was already 3.30 and the driver told me there was no way I would get to Cape Maclear my last destination of my holiday before dark. No minibus was to be seen. The only mode of transport we could find was a small truck - which was totally loaded with people and luggage. No way of sitting anywhere. It looked very dangerous. The driver was genially worried and rang his boss who told him he could drive me all the way for \$100 dollars. I thought what the hell I paid all that money I might as well pay some more and at least arrive in one piece.

Demelza owns a house in Cape Maclear right on the lake. I had a couple of relaxing days there. While I was there I met a young Dutch couple who had arrived by truck and minibus and had no intention to go through such an experience again. They had hired a taxi to Zomba a town about 60 m from Blantyre. I decided to share the taxi with them to Zomba and from there to take a minibus. The minibus took three hour over 60 km on terrible roads and of course filled to the hilt. I finally made it to Demelza’s house.

It is hard to believe that the 8 weeks are over. It was a fantastic experience. Staying with 13 hosts in all has given me an experience I would not have had any other way. I am thankful to all my hosts and especially to Demelza. Because of her dedication to the ideals of Servas and her energy I got the opportunity to spend 8 wonderful weeks in Malawi.

☺ **Best Moments:** Feedback at the English MWAJ workshop. Mvu Lodge – breakfast ‘en-board’ as elephants passed.

☹ **Worst moments:** 8hour minibus journey Mulanje to Liwonde. Disheartening:Shambolic welcome at Chichiri prison 1st Day.



Giraffe hiding out at Game Heaven



Mulanje Mountain from Kara O’Mula



Close up!! Elephant at Liwonde Park



Lake view - front of Patasile cottage Cape Maclear