

July 19-25th, 2009

Note to self: Remember to check the torque on the Land Cruiser drive shaft U-bolts once in a while.

This past week has provided a collection of disappointments, sorrow/grief, phenomenal experiences, learning opportunities (e.g. the tightening of the bolts on the drive shaft of our Land Cruiser), opportunities to make new friends and visits with others from earlier trips.

On the evening of the 24th, we rolled into Mayoka Village, Nkhata Bay, at 9:00, with our 1984 Toyota Land Cruiser, but the trip from Dar es Salaam, and the days that led up to it, were packed with the fore-mentioned variety of experiences. So I should back up some in time.

One might ask why we chose to import a 25 year old Land Cruiser rather than rent vehicles when we needed them. Or, given that we were firm on the notion of shipping one to Africa, then why one that old?

Malawi is the Country where we have chosen to carry out humanitarian efforts to help local people become self sustainable—which does not mean we hand out food or anything else—and Malawi is also home to some very rough roads. The Land Cruiser is the vehicle of choice since they are known to last a long time in rough conditions.

Why not rent one each time we are there? Over time, the expense of rentals becomes a major issue and our experience with rentals is that they often break down—never in a place that is convenient. Furthermore, one cannot purchase liability insurance for a rented vehicle so if an accident occurs, the potential for fault, as determined by the investigating police, is another issue.

As for the age of our vehicle, we like them better than the new ones and their value, as determined by local officials, is much lower. Since importation of vehicles requires a tax of approximately 90%, the amount one must pay is significantly less for an older vehicle.

Back in May, we loaded our Land Cruiser—a product of 3½ years of restoration work—on our transporter and headed to the Long Beach Port for shipment to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. From Long Beach it sailed to Germany and then, on another ship to Antwerp. Finally, after another transfer to a third ship, it sailed through the Suez Canal, past Somalia and down the eastern side of Africa to the Dar es Salaam Port.

Although the arrival of our Land Cruiser in Dar occurred in early July, we were told it would not be cleared for a week or more. So we headed to Malawi to begin our work. On the pre-determined date (July 18th) we (my Wife Clarice, Tessa who is a student at ASU, and myself) flew back to Dar es Salaam, but quickly learned the necessary paperwork was still in progress. A mistake had been made at some point and we would just have to wait. Since the port allows a 14-day grace period before storage charges begin to occur, we hoped there would still be enough time. But after 5 more days

and nights, while we cooled our heels in a hotel that was somewhat above our means, we came to realize that hidden expenses were coming from different directions.

Finally, on the 6th day, we learned that our vehicle would be cleared and it was time to go to the port. We arrived about noon and were taken to a room packed with clearing agents; all of who were waiting to get their paperwork processed. The wait began all over again and not until 6:30 PM, 30 minutes after closing, did we see our own clearing agent reappear. He, Festus, told us it would only be a little more time and we could walk to the gate through which cleared vehicles must pass for final inspection.

At about 7:00 we finally saw our Land Cruiser in line and I was told to get in and gradually guide it to the front—a process that required some slow-paced assertive driving



skills on my part. When my turn came at the gate, the required inspections were carried out while Clarice and Tessa jumped in. When I got the signal to proceed, our clearing agent got in too and guided me to a spot where we received proper insurance stickers, reflectors for the bumper, a fire extinguisher and the required reflecting triangles that every vehicle must carry even though I seldom see them deployed when vehicles break down.

From the gate, we had two hours to make it to the first check station, which, by so doing, would represent our departure from the City. Heavy traffic is seemingly a constant in Dar and evening had long since begun. It was necessary to purchase some petrol but I was not given enough time to clean the windshield made dirty by the two months at sea followed by two weeks in storage at the port. It would have to be enough to use the windshield washer and wipers to gain some semblance of a clean(er) windshield.

We wound through the City streets and then, finally, into more open spaces but all the while in heavy traffic. After a couple of hours, Festus informed us that we were nearing the first check station yet it was hardly noticeable. That which actually clued us to the fact that we had come upon the check station was the large collection of parked cars and trucks and then we saw, in the dark, a small shack with crowds of drivers—all males—standing in front of a window with a single agent seated behind. He, alone, was processing the papers handed to him by each driver and there seemed little suggestion of order—more like a melee than anything else.

Our clearing agent reached through the open window and placed our paperwork next to the official. What I later learned was that the order of processing was not based upon the sequence of papers on the stack. Some that arrived later seemed to get processed first and it took about an hour for ours to get the proper stamp.

From that point, we were on our own. Our clearing agent told us we would have to continue to drive for a while until we reached the second check station. Then it would

be necessary to stop for the night since, beyond that point, there was the danger of rogue gangs that might car-jack us and Land Cruisers were their vehicle of choice.

At first, the traffic flow went along at a normal pace and we made decent time. However, before we reached the second checkpoint we came across a long line of trucks stopped on the highway. The trucks, we later found out, were lined up for a truck stop and since there was no place for them to park, they remained, stopped, on the highway.

With the single lane in our direction clogged with the long line of trucks, other vehicles were going into the oncoming lane with no regard for the possibility of traffic coming in the opposite direction. It was easy to see that no cars would be coming so we joined them and passed seemingly miles of trucks stopped in single file.

At one point, we heard sirens and saw police vehicles cutting a path through the traffic from the opposite direction. Since my steering wheel is on the left side of our vehicle, and everyone else had theirs on the right (traffic in much of Africa flows on the left), I could easily communicate with the drivers of the vehicles next to me. An opportunity to do so with a truck driver quickly developed and I asked—no pleaded—for him to let me in so the police vehicles could pass. He did so with a quick wave of his hand and I did not wait a second longer.

With our experience in finding the first check station, it was relatively easy to recognize the second one. There were trucks stopped along, and on, the highway yet I was able to move through them enough to park our vehicle off the road not far from the check station. After asking a few drivers where we could find the official, a man appeared and, with a pleasant greeting, asked me to show our vehicle. He must have realized that we would need a place to stay because he then walked with Clarice and I (Tessa appeared to be asleep in the back seat but I knew that she really did not want to watch as we moved through the traffic along the highway) to a rest house.

The proprietor said he had a room and took what appeared to be the last key off the board that hung on the wall. We walked to the room and saw that the bed, equipped with a mosquito net and two pillows, was really meant for one, possibly two, people. We quickly said we would take the small room and bed as there appeared to be no other option.

Clarice and I walked back to the vehicle to tell Tessa about the room and then went to wait for our paperwork to be processed along with about 15 other drivers. There were no other women in the melee and we held each other close. We worked our way toward the front of the pack and I noticed that, as one official worked on processing, the other—the fellow with the earlier pleasant greeting—began to look through the stack and then pulled one from the file. It was ours and he took a few moments to read it before he casually placed it on the top of the stack.

This seeming purposeful act allowed our papers to be the next processed and it was not much longer before we had our stamp and could move our vehicle to the rest house—easier said than done as the trucks still blocked the highway and shoulders so we could not even use the four-wheel drive to get to where we needed. Then our same

official ‘benefactor’ walked up to the truckers and told each that they would have to move their vehicles so that others could pass. After a short wait, we got our chance to drive onto the highway for the fifty or so meters to reach the rest house. We parked in a safe spot next to the building and took what few belongings we needed for the night.

As small as the room was, there was a private bathroom and sink. However, the toilet was not of the western style, which meant that we would get some practice in squatting before our stay was over. We quickly prepared the bed-net and I took the section closest to the wall while Clarice and Tessa watched large (presumably fruit-eating) bats outside our window. Clarice then climbed into the center of the bed while Tessa took the opposite side. We kept the ceiling fan on and turned out the light. With the darkness, there was little to suggest, other than the shortage of room on the bed, that we were not in a fancier hotel. I’ve always said that I sleep with my eyes closed so, when in that state, the layout of the room does not matter much.

Six hours of sleep was enough and we were out of the rest house by 7:00. The traffic of the night before had cleared and we experienced an easy drive as we headed west along Highway A7. What mattered most was getting something to eat and petrol for the Land Cruiser. When we came to the town of Morogoro, the highway joined another that came from the north. Petrol was easy to find but there was no place that looked decent for food so we continued.

At one point we saw a female police officer who stood at the side with others as she waited for public transport. I stopped to confirm that we were headed in the right direction and then invited her to ride with us. She accepted and rode along to another village. At the place where she wanted to be let off, Mzinga, we saw a few roadside shops that featured bananas, mandazi (small doughnut-like fried rolls) and bread, and chose to make these basic items the main part of our breakfast. The main part, I say, as we had brought Cheerios in self-sealing plastic bags from home to be used as packing. Some years ago I came up with the idea of using sealed bags of Cheerios as packing for international trips since they could be eaten once their initial function was complete. Thus, along with the bread and bananas, we ate dry Cheerios.

The highway was riddled with speed bumps and it took little time to figure out the pattern of warning signs followed by the actual bump. It seemed that nearly all villages along the route had one or two of these traffic control devices. First one comes upon three (usually) rows of small bumps that reminded me of fluting on wooden furniture—three ridges in each that were stretched across the road. What followed was an abrupt speed bump that had to be negotiated at a greatly reduced speed to avoid becoming airborne. A couple of times, due to distractions perhaps, I failed to slow sufficiently and the Land Cruiser seemed to launch into air. This rough treatment was enough to dislodge the lenses in my new, high-powered, headlights, which, from that point on, were dim. We would not learn about that problem until much later in the day.

We crossed Mikumi National Park and drove along the northern edge of another, Udzungwa National Park. At



first, we just saw baboons along the road but soon we saw giraffe, zebra, impala and an elephant. All of these are familiar from previous trips but this drive provided our first opportunity to see African wildlife from our own vehicle and that difference made for some excitement. The elephant, always my favorite to see in the wild, did not stay long and by the time the camera was ready it had headed off amongst the trees and shrubs. The zebra, lingered a bit longer—seemingly just enough to satisfy curiosity—and then moved on. In that moment of their gaze, however, I was able to capture the picture I wanted to send

back to the tire company representatives who donated the new tires for our Land Cruiser. At least most of their bumper sticker remained visible after the guy at the Dar port placed reflective tape on the bumper.

The giraffe numbered at least a dozen which is a larger number than



we usually see together. Other sightings kept that portion of the drive even more interesting than already experienced. We would have liked to remain in the game park for a day or so but were on a regimented time and route schedule.

The road along the northern perimeter of Udzungwa National Park skirted the Rubeho Mountains farther to the north and the Lukose River to the south. The road, itself, was very rough and we had to stop several times to wait our turn to drive through



construction zones. To add excitement, we came upon more than one overturned truck.



The construction zones, especially, caused us to realize we would not make it to the Malawian border by the time they closed the gate so we began to think about where we might find a decent place to stay and, based upon our detailed map, Mbeya looked to be the best candidate.

At one construction zone we encountered ours was the second vehicle in line and several buses came up behind us. They were vintage highway cruiser and some still had Japanese characters on the side, which gave away their origin. Many of the trucks, cars and buses in Africa come via ships from Japan as used vehicles. They then regain their status as primary means of transport and are virtually run into the ground.

The line of busses behind us suddenly broke rank and moved forward along both shoulders of the highway. Someone spoke to the flagman and before I realized, it, he opened the gate. What happened next, in retrospect, reminded me of an old fashion land stampede where people in the old west lined up to wait a signal and then stampede their wagons across the prairie so they could claim land for a homestead. The prize, this time, was not land but a place near the front of the line and sizes of vehicles definitely played a factor.

Once free of the construction zones we realized that our next checkpoint, at Makumbako, was not far ahead. We were now on Highway A104, which we had joined at Iringa—also the place where we had found a good ‘fast food’ place for lunch. The menu was displayed in a counter behind glass so we chose what best suited our palates from the few options. Bottled chilled drinks were available as well and we enjoyed discussion with the proprietors and other drivers—some from the vehicle stampede.

Along the way between Iringa and Makumbako, I heard a request for a bathroom stop and began the search to find a safe spot. The thick vegetation along the road did not present a good option, as one cannot be certain what else might be there. After a while the scenery turned more open with occasional bushes and knee-high grass. At this point, I pulled off the road and maneuvered the Land Cruiser to block the view from the road.

Absolute privacy was not in the books, however. Unseen before, a Masai man and his herd of cattle came toward us. Although there was little danger for the potty-goer to get trampled, privacy was threatened. Just then the person in question emerged from the grass and all modesty-relevant concerns were erased.



As we rolled into Makumbako, it was late afternoon and we faced another episode of night driving before we would reach Mbeya. Still unknown to us was the fact that the rough roads had taken a toll on our new, high intensity, headlights but before that realization hit us, we had to find the checkpoint and presiding official.

After questioning a couple of different individuals, we located the checkpoint and a friendly official who took our papers and processed them immediately. There were no other drivers fighting to be first—only ourselves, and the official seemed happy to be of service.

He gave us some information about the distance to Mbeya and the directions to the turn at Highway B-345 that headed due south toward Malawi. We stopped for petrol and by then the sunlight had dimmed enough for us to switch on the headlights but they seemed to make little difference. Compared to the night before, we could barely determine that they were on. Without realizing the cause for their being dim, but knowing that we could not afford to chance confrontation with car-jackers, we headed on toward Mbeya with the dim headlights becoming somewhat more helpful as darkness set in.



On the outskirts of Mbeya, Clarice saw a hotel that seemed almost out of place with its comparatively lavish appearance—not like seeing the Nugget as one enters Reno but certainly with more lights and signs than we had seen on any building since Dar. The New Holland Hotel—who knows where the name came from—was our immediate choice for overnight

accommodations regardless of price. We passed through the security gate and were immediately greeted by a friendly manager who took our bags and escorted us into the hotel. The rates were reasonable so we were able to provide Tessa with her own room and that revelation pleased her. A stew dinner, with a bottle of Serengeti beer for me, was prepared and served in a pleasant dining room. These minor comforts were a welcome alternative to night driving or sleeping three in a bed made for one.

The next morning came almost too soon but, between the night before and the morning, each of us was able to take a shower and wash away the dirt from the rough roads. The Land Cruiser had a bath, too, courtesy of one of the hotel staff. After a breakfast that featured the ever-offered eggs, we loaded the Land Cruiser and headed toward Tukuyu along Highway B345. The road climbed into the mountains and on either side we passed through pineapple and banana plantations. The scenery was lush and beautiful as we climbed and drove along through the mountains.



At some point, I noted a vibration in the Land Cruiser and voiced my thought that it was due to imprints on the highway made by heavy equipment. Yet, the vibration continued and I began to think otherwise. In my mind, I considered ways to try to determine the source of the vibration and started to vary my speed. Above 40 mph, the vibrations were evident while below that they seemed to cease. When I accelerated, we could not detect the sound either but when I allowed the vehicle to coast in gear, the vibrations returned. This combination of symptoms suggested to me that there was a problem with the driveshaft but I had no tools, as they were not allowed when we shipped the Land Cruiser and there was no time to shop once we took possession of it in Dar. From there to the border, I kept the speed at a level that did not continue to cause the vibration.

When we reached the Malawian border we were met by throngs of men trying to sell auto insurance policies along with those who offered Malawian Kwacha (money) on the black market. Since we had sufficient Kwacha to fund our travel—we did not really want to deal with the black market—and I had decided upon an insurance company even before we left Lilongwe for Dar, so the peddlers' cries went unanswered.

The border marked the last of the four checkpoints and, though no one else seemed to be in need, the official took about 30 minutes to process our form. His demeanor was nearly the antithesis of what we had found at the prior checkpoint but we were glad to have the last one out of the way.

Due to instructions we had received prior to our departure from Lilongwe, we knew which clearing agent to ask for upon our arrival. Roger, appeared very soon afterward and assured us he would be able to take care of everything. Just to be sure, I asked an official if Roger was a legitimate clearing agent and received an affirmative response. After going through immigration, Roger requested that I park the Land Cruiser in an open lot on the Malawi side of the border. Then we would simply have to wait for a couple of hours.

While we waited, I decided to check the driveline on the Land Cruiser and it did not take long to see that the nuts on the rear U-bolts had loosened. I could easily wiggle the driveshaft with my hand and needed a box-end wrench to tighten the nuts. The driveshaft had been modified and balanced before we left Phoenix and I had installed it myself. So I knew the nuts were tight before the vehicle was shipped. The lesson: remember to check the torque on the Land Cruiser drive shaft U-bolts once in a while.

Clarice had noticed a man doing some repair work on a truck near by so I walked over to ask if he would tighten the nuts on my U-bolts. He agreed to do so and the problem was quickly resolved—no more vibrations for the duration of our journey and he was happy to receive 500 Kwacha¹ for his effort.

We had picked up an hour when we crossed the border since Tanzania and Malawi are on different time zones. Even so, we once again faced the prospects of night driving since we did not get official clearance until about 2:30 and our next destination, Nkhata Bay, was well over 300 km, and a few hours, away. We used our cell phone to call our friends, proprietors of Mayoka Village at Nkhata Bay, to hold a room. It's nice to have friends and we were assured a room would be ready upon our arrival.

First, however, our clearing agent, Roger, had to ride with us to Karonga, about 25 km into Malawi, to have some papers processed for us. I was hearing cries for lunch as well, so after our papers were processed, we stopped at a roadside restaurant located by a museum that displays Malawi's dinosaur fossil. My request for quick service meant nothing to the server, so I wandered over to peek through the window of the museum. There it stood, a dinosaur fossil that stood at least 10 feet tall and 25 feet long. Being fond of dinosaurs, I might have gone inside for a closer look but my desire to take advantage of daylight on the highway overruled my herpetological instincts.

We were finally served and Tessa ended up stuffing much of her lunch into a bag to eat along the way. We headed south along Malawi Highway 1, which runs the entire length of the Country. Malawi is a long and relatively narrow Country and Highway 1 is

¹ Malawian currency (500 MKW = \$3.60 US at the time this story took place)

the main truck route. As such, it has had much to do with the spread of AIDS throughout the Country—sort of a geographical ‘perfect storm’.

The highway skirts Lake Malawi for much of the way and the scenery is enjoyable. Yet, in the back of my mind, was concern over the dim headlights and we stopped in a small town (known as a ‘boma’ in Malawi) to try to either repair or replace the headlights. The latter idea was not really an option as auto parts stores in that region are rare at best. However, a man with tools, and apparent skill with automotive repair, appeared and together we extracted the headlights from the vehicle.

Since the headlights were semi-sealed, that meant we could access the inside and maneuver the lenses that had dropped due to harsh shaking of the vehicle on the rough roads of Tanzania. The mechanic was eventually able to position the lenses back into their holders, by reaching his fingers down inside the headlight, and then applied Super Glue. I would have not expected to find Super Glue in the boma any more than an auto parts store, but the mechanic had it at his disposal.

An hour passed while we worked and, after paying the mechanic MK 7000—about \$50—we resumed our drive south. The sun had already dropped below the mountains to the west so I kept the speed as fast as possible without forfeiting safety. Malawi is as famous for stalled trucks along the road as is Tanzania and the pavement surface is nearly the same.

On previous trips to Malawi the City of Mizuzu marked the furthest point north we had traveled and, at 6:00, we still had two hours of driving to reach that point. Since July is a winter month in Malawi, all sunlight was gone by 6:00; so all three of us watched the road ahead in the dim lights. Luckily, there were relatively few trucks or autos on the road because it was difficult to see beyond the headlights of oncoming vehicles. Likewise, at most, we only came upon one disabled truck in our lane all the way to Mizuzu.

Yet the relatively light traffic provided the backdrop for the most frightening experience we had on the entire trip. As we drove along in the dark, through a somewhat winding section of the highway, a truck appeared as it came from the opposite direction. As it passed, my vision was briefly blinded by the headlights then suddenly two bicyclists, without lights, appeared in front of us. There was only an instant to react and avoid the bicyclists and I swerved into the lane just vacated by the passing truck. How we missed the bicyclists, we don’t know, but the distance between us, and them, could only have been by inches.



We reached Mizuzu about 8:00 and tried to call Mayoka Village to verify that we were still on our way but the phone system was down. After purchasing petrol for the Land Cruiser, we continued south for the final hour’s drive to Nkhata Bay. I was familiar with the road

and knew it would wind down the mountains to reach Lake level at Nkhata Bay. We had come upon broken down trucks along this stretch in the past but were in luck this time and safely rolled into Nkhata Bay at 9:00. We headed straight through town and up the rough road that led to the parking space just above Mayoka Village—a wonderful set of chalets, with an outdoor bar and restaurant, owned by our friends, Kathryn and Gary.

Mayoka Village is a popular spot for Peace Corps volunteers and college-aged people who travel about Africa during European summer break. Our eldest daughter, who was in the Peace Corps in 2004, had introduced it to us back then. We had, since, visited Mayoka Village each time we came to Malawi and wanted to make sure to do so again. We also wanted to give Tessa a chance to see it.

The whole place is built on the side of a steep slope that drops into the Lake and the steps down from the parking area are something of a challenge—especially when carrying a suitcase or backpack. The bar and restaurant set near the water and there was a relatively large crowd when we entered. We were immediately welcomed by the workers who knew us from past visits, but learned that Kathryn and Gary were away for some quiet time and we would not be able to see them.

We sat at the only available table on the patio but were not disappointed. Our location had us close to the Lake and a bit away from the bustle and lights that surrounded the bar crowd. We ordered sandwiches and I asked for a Kuchi Kuchi—Malawi’s National Beer. Once again, we had survived a few hours of night driving and it was good to relax. There was time to talk and watch people, as service at Mayoka Village is notoriously slow—part of the ambiance actually. A young woman from Germany performed a series of dances, in return for donations, as a way to earn funds to support her trip around the World. After we finished eating, we headed to our chalet and retired for the evening. Tessa had already fallen in love with Mayoka Village.

In the morning, after a quick surveillance of Mayoka Village in daylight, I found that the small outdoor shower that I had used on earlier trips had been replaced by a more enclosed facility. I could not even think about checking out this new ‘improvement’. It probably had hot water too, while the shower it replaced allowed one to stand, unexposed from the neck down, under a stream of cold water and look out on the Lake. It had quickly become my favorite place to shower and, for some reason, I had never found



myself in need to wait for someone else ahead of me. Now all the luxuries I had come to associate with that shower were gone—one, and the only, bad mark for Mayoka Village. I’ll have to complain to Gary and Kathryn the next time I see them.

Being forced to use the shower, with hot water, in our chalet, I washed away yesterday’s dirt. Tessa had already done so the night before and Clarice followed my morning lead. We headed

down to the patio to get breakfast and find a certain person who worked there. She had already gone home before we arrived the night before and we wanted to see her.

Edias (aka Maria) is a Malawian woman who had initially worked at Mayoka Village as a housekeeper. That is the position she held when we originally met her in 2006 on our second trip to Malawi. Her life story had started out like that of the majority of her Nation's counterparts. She was basically shoved out of her family at about 13 and, to survive, married a man for protection. After she bore three children, Edias was left pretty much on her own to raise them. Then her sister died and Edias took on the responsibility of raising her niece as well. The income she earned as a housekeeper at Mayoka Village was barely enough to feed and house the family—never mind paying for school related expenses.

When we met Edias, she expressed interest in going back to school and we had kept her in our thoughts following our return to the US that year. A chance conversation with a colleague at work stimulated a recapping of Edias' story and our fellow co-worker took the story to her local woman's club. She later told us that they could not raise a great deal of money but wanted to help Edias so she could return to school. The amount they sent, via Kathryn and Gary, (approximately \$300) may not have seemed like much to them but it served to allow Edias to enroll in school while she kept her job. She was also able to place her children in school, which meant that the impact of our colleague's club would have far-reaching effects.

On a return trip in 2007, Gary was visibly excited to share what had transpired as a result of Edias' return to school. Soon after she enrolled, both Kathryn and Gary noticed that Edias' math computation skills had improved. She was good at keeping records associated with her job and they elevated her to manager of the housekeepers. As time progressed, so did her math skills, and she was again promoted. By the time of my 2007 visit, Edias was no longer in housekeeping but, rather, she was doing all of the bookkeeping for Mayoka Village. She had computed their taxes at the end of the year and maintained all financial records. She even had her own desk where she worked and, to some extent, managed operations.



Needless to say, we were eager to see Edias this time and wanted to learn about any further successes. Not long after we sat down for breakfast, Edias appeared and immediately embraced Clarice and I. She had known we were due to arrive but did not expect that we would have to depart so soon. I asked if she had recently received another check from our colleague's club and she had. Edias shared comments about her family and their continued progress in school. As for herself, she is now taking courses to enhance her skills with computers. Her

story is one to illustrate how relatively minor efforts on the part of a few have made a significant and lasting effect on others in this remote place.

However, what we did in Edias' case does not represent our normal approach. Typically speaking, sending, or handing, money to a person in such a situation bears little chance of favorable outcomes. In fact, we have witnessed, often enough, how such an act of giving aid has backfired. We have seen the negative outcomes on the personal level in Malawi and elsewhere—a topic for another writing. Others have written about this issue on both national and global scales.²

Our approach, under the auspices of Sustainable Resources, Ltd³, has been to promote means for people to learn skills and become entrepreneurs in their villages. This trip and those in the past—indeed the shipment of our Land Cruiser—have all been tied to our interests in helping people in south Central Africa to remove themselves out of extreme poverty. Our mode has been to work at the village level to determine what they need—from their perspectives—and work to find ways to help them fulfill those needs. At the same time we work to provide means for them to learn skills so to improve upon their respective situations. There are those who feed orphans, for instance, and that is a good thing but we focus on long-term outcomes. Amongst our target population are women, girls and disabled—none of whom are served well in Malawi nor most other sub-Saharan African countries.

All too soon, it was time for us to leave and Edias accompanied us up the steep stairs to the parking area and our Land Cruiser. The departure was emotional, and involved many hugs, before we drove down the rocky road toward the center of Nkhata Bay. However, there was one more stop scheduled before we headed south on Highway 1. Tessa had wanted to purchase some carvings and we have a friend in Nkhata Bay who is a talented wood carver. We have known MacDonald since our first trip in 2004 and had developed a level of trust. For us, he would not price his carvings high so as to start the bargaining process and we would not try to get him to sell at prices that minimized his profits to the point that he made next to nothing for his fine work.



² For more on the issue of how foreign aid has negatively affected sustainable development for people in developing and pre-developing countries, see: Dambisa Moyo, *Dead aid: Why aid is not working and how there is a better way for Africa* (2009); William Easterly, *The White Man's Burden, Why the West's efforts to aid the Rest have done so much ill and so little good* (2006); Jon Jeter, *Flat broke in the free market: How globalization fleeced working people* (2009).

³ Please see our website at: www.sustainableltd.org

Since we had arrived late the night before, MacDonald did not know we were in town. Ordinarily word would spread when we arrived, as other carvers also knew us, so he was surprised when he spotted us near the marketplace. After warm greetings, and his introduction to Tessa, he joined us in the Land Cruiser to ride back to his shop on the bumpy road that led toward Mayoka Village.

As Clarice and Tessa went to join MacDonald in his shop, Tessa quietly asked if she should try to bargain. I told her that in this case that it was not necessary since he would quote fair prices right off then called out a friendly reminder to him to not give us ‘Mizungu’⁴ prices. Furthermore, we did not have a lot of time to shop. He, and his colleagues gathered outside his shop, laughed at my comment.

As Clarice and Tessa looked over his carvings and paintings—generally created by his cousin, Bensen—one of his assistants appeared with a new carving that was destined to be exhibited at Mayoka Village. It was a two-pieced dark wooden globe that came apart so as to make separate bowls or to store something inside. On the outside was a rough, though easily recognizable, depiction of the World with all continents properly positioned relative to one another. Both Clarice and I took one look at it and asked his price—sold immediately! The wooden globe never had a chance to make it for display at Mayoka Village and I am sure, if it had, this piece would not have remained long before someone else bought it—probably at a higher price.

With carvings and paintings purchased, we loaded back into the Land Cruiser and headed back to the center of Nkhata Bay where MacDonald and his assistant would wrap our purchases in scraps of cardboard. He also wanted us to meet his wife and young son so we waited a few moments while he went to find cardboard and his wife. We stood by the Land Cruiser and our new acquisitions now layed out on a cleared spot on the ground.

MacDonald soon returned and we were introduced to his wife who was happy to meet us and probably pleased that we had made the purchases as the number of tourists who bought carvings had dropped with the global economic situation. MacDonalds artwork already graces our house and I informed him that a painting, done by Benson



with a frame he had specifically carved for that painting, hung in our living room. Other paintings and frames we purchased in the past hang elsewhere in our house or have been presented as gifts to friends. He showed pleasure with that information and we reminded him that we would stop again on our next return visit. Tessa was clearly pleased with her purchases.

⁴ Expression used by Malawians, not necessarily meant as derogatory, to denote European/American white people.

There was one more promised stop before Lilongwe. Nkhotakota Pottery Factory, on the Lake shore south of Nkhotakota Boma, and its affiliate, Dedza Pottery Factory, in Dedza (<http://www.dedzapottery.com/>), south of Lilongwe, provide examples of successful ventures that create quality pottery and employ many Malawians. Clarice and I had purchased a set of dinner ware during our first trip to Malawi and these dishes had become our everyday set. Tessa had seen them one day before our departure and decided that Nakotakota Pottery factory was a place she wanted to visit.

The ride from Nkhata Bay to Nkhotakota takes three to four hours and we arrived at the pottery factory turn-off in mid afternoon. The dirt road from the highway to the factory is about four to five kilometers and ends right at the Lake. Tessa and Clarice went inside while I put some petrol in the tank that we had carried for emergency. We were close to Salima where we could purchase enough fuel for the remainder of our trip and I saw little reason to continue to carry the spare fuel any further.

Tessa was on a mission and by the time I got inside she had picked a pattern for her own dinner ware. I learned later that she had intended to look for a pattern at the pottery factory after she had seen our dinner ware at home. Though unable to carry much on this trip, Tessa at least collected a few items with the pattern she chose.

After purchases were made, we walked down to the restaurant to have something



to drink. Although it would have been nice to have a Kuchi Kuchi, I settled for a cup of coffee to help me remain alert for the three hour drive back to Lilongwe.

There was a strong breeze blowing off the Lake—strong enough to stir waves. We had stayed at the resort next to the pottery factory in 2006 and remembered that the wind often came up in the afternoon. It is, after all, winter in Malawi.

The drive to Lilongwe was relatively uneventful. As we drove past the dirt road that led to the village where we lived, with our four (adult aged) children in 2004, I resisted the temptation to stop because darkness was beginning to set in. We especially wanted to see Kadakungwa, a wood cutter who we had befriended and set up to build solar cookers for distribution. He had become sold on the idea as soon as we showed him how to cook a pot of rice with one of our solar cookers.

Our stop would have to come on the next trip and, with a final purchase of petrol in Salima, we drove the final 100 km through the dark of another Malawian night. There were few trucks or cars on the road that Saturday night and, for that, we were grateful. At 9:00 PM, we rolled into Lilongwe and pulled into the parking area of the Golden

Peacock; the resthouse where we stay when in that City. Sulomen, the proprietor, was there and greeted us in his typically friendly manner. He knew to expect us and had a room ready, albeit very small. The room, made to hold two single beds at best, was crammed with three so we made the most of it.

We talked about the drive with Sulomen for a while, had dinner and retired for the evening. With only three more days left to work on our projects before departure to the US, we had much for which to think about and plan. There was the planting of *Jatropha* trees in Njewa Village planned for the next day and that operation would require some coordination with villagers. We had hope to plant about 1000 trees so to get the plantation started.

On Monday, I had to go to the airport, in a rented truck since we could not drive the Land Cruiser anymore until we paid importation taxes (over 90%), registration and insurance. The trip to the airport was to pick up devices that had been shipped and were now ready to proceed through clearance—another long wait was in store for me in that



regard. That afternoon we had an appointment with the US Ambassador to Malawi as he wanted to know more about our project for disabled Malawians.

Then on Tuesday, we would need to drive back past Salima to Senga Bay to deliver one of the newly arrived devices to Anthony, a polio stricken wood carver who we interviewed in 2006. It had taken three years for a succession of three student design teams to come up



with a device worthy of shipping and delivery. Anthony's smile, when he saw the device, made the expense and airport wait all worthwhile.

We departed for the US early Wednesday morning with a sense of exhaustion and a bit of frustration that we had not been able to complete all or our goals for this trip. Although we had interviewed enough disabled people for the incoming bioengineering class, there was not enough time to get all of those we brought to the people for whom they were intended. Our network system of contacts would have to finish the few deliveries. We had also wanted to set up a bakery at Njewa Village so villagers could start that enterprise. Eventually, we hope that it, along with others, will generate funds to support the school for women and girls once it is built in that



same village. First we need to raise about \$125,000 to build the school.

Still, we were pleased with the progress and that we would have a vehicle available for our trips yet to occur.