

Stories of volunteers:



It's getting slowly bright outside. The birds happily rehearse their melodies, their range is very varied, from those little whistling voices, to loud and long whistles. In the distance, the soft murmur of Lake Malawi can be heard from my room at ELA's centre. Today lake it is not too turbulent, so you will probably soon hear the drumming and loud singing of fishermen, who, in their characteristic narrow boats carved out of a single trunk, will return from a night hunt for a very popular little fish called usipa. Any meeting with a mother who rushes from the field home to cook lunch for at least 6 or more children with a child tied on her back, a large bucket full of cassava potatoes on her head is a sight for once heart. Despite her fatigue, her voice and face are always flooded with so much happiness and joy that she has met you that she will not leave you indifferent in any way. Your lips automatically stretch all the way to your ears. Then, of course, the children who follow you in the group and shout your name from afar because they learnt your name at ELA's centre during daily workshops. Kids are always smiling, happy with home-made toys or a quick swim in the lake. Here again I realize how happy I am to have been given to experience a world without all this material "luxury" that robbed us of this wonderful simplicity and in such a sophisticated way, insidiously stole from us this wonderful feeling of inner happiness and peace.

Evenings are also a special experience when night falls on the village of Mazembe and the lights in front of the wooden, straw or mud huts as the locals prepare dinner are the only twinkling lights that conjure up a very calm and warm atmosphere. The friendly locals, who sit in groups around the fire, are happy to kindly invite you to share their humble dinner with you. Just like at every turn, they give you that pleasant warm feeling of acceptance and joy that you have become one of them, even though they shook your hand for the first time a good week ago.

Thank you Jana, thank you Mazembe and above all thank you all the children for this beautiful experience. Thank you that you helped me to find and feel this inner peace and happiness again.

MOJCA ZAJC



I often say to myself that I was born in the wrong period – too late I would say. This winter, something wonderful happened to me, something so beautiful that I never dreamed about. I went back a few decades, to a time when there wasn't all the possible electronics, fancy cars, all the food imaginable, and when electricity was a rarity. I went back to a time when people valued friendship, kindness and simplicity, this time was conjured up for me by Africa - Malawi.

The people in this beautiful country are so happy, kind and joyful just to chat with me. I quickly got quite a few new friends asking me about my world of Europe. About what we do, what life looks like. All the days in Africa were something special to me; every day I learnt something new, sometimes I was an educator trying to teach children how to write numbers, other times I was a mother wiping crocodile tears, I also became a doctor who bandages wounds, a cook who has to feed her friends, a gardener who learns how and where to sow grass, and every day the overjoyed Ana, who walks around with the children of Africa. I confide in you another moment that moved me greatly and confirmed to me that going to Africa was my best decision in life. Let me first tell you that Africans - Malawians are very religious people. Faith keeps them upright, so it is almost obligatory to attend mass in the village, introduce yourself to all believers and chat with them a bit. So we went to a mass on the first Sunday and introduced ourselves. Pastor Peter gave us such a nice welcome that it just warmed my heart. He told us how honored he was that we came right to their village, that we gave up all luxuries of our homes and came to live this simple life. I felt so nicely received and appreciated. For me, it was an unforgettable experience that still fills me with energy and positivity every day. At the thought of all the warmth I got there and all the angels who kept me upright even in difficult moments, tears are still streaming down my cheeks today. Thank you ELA for making this experience possible for me, I will be forever grateful.

ANA ERZAR



For several years now, I have had a strong desire to visit Africa. I wanted to do something good and get to know African culture and its people better. To get to know them better and not just believe what is written in the media. After careful consideration, I decided to join ELA's organisation, in the warm heart of Africa - in Malawi. In high anticipation of a month-long trip to Africa, I had been reading posts on ELA's page for months, got to know Jana's amazing projects and, of course, got to know Africa through various books.

But when I arrived at this beautiful piece of land, I realized that basically nothing could prepare me for this journey. When I was going there I was just thinking about how I was going to do something good for little cute kids, how I was going to teach them something. At the end of this adventure, however, I realized that Africa was the one that taught me so many things I didn't know before. I met really heartfelt people who are in love with life, with Mother Nature, with each other. I experienced a thousand and one adventures and spent the most beautiful month of my life there.

You know Africa has a special aura when you're there it's hard not to laugh all the way through. The people around you laugh, sing and, above all, do not deal with unnecessary worries, in which we are true professionals. Only on such a journey, where you are in the center of the village and live with the locals, where the pastor comes to invite you to mass, where the villagers bless you to be happy, protected in your life; then you get to know Africa in the true sense of the word. That's when you realize that Africa has always been presented to the "developed world" as a poor, sad, hopeless continent, and in the end you realize that we - the developed part of the world - are the "poor". Africans are happy in the true sense of the word and we can learn a lot about life from them.

Right there on the black continent, in the warm heart of Africa, where everyone is kind to you, where everyone shouts bho bho /(how are you) behind you and give you his hands in greeting, where at every step you buy the sweetest bananas in the world and after running all day workshops at ELA's centre you swim in a paradise Lake Malawi, yes, there you have the feeling that the world stops, calms down and life becomes beautiful. I fell in love with life there, in Africa and I will return to Malawi, to our Jana and the beloved angels. I am attaching a quote that really most succinctly describes my journey and experience of Africa.

"I never knew of a morning in Africa when I woke up that I was not happy." –Hemingway

VALENTINA SLODNJAK



I have been a volunteer in several organisations all around Europe and since high school I wanted to be a volunteer abroad as well. Something drew me to Africa and I finally found an organisation that immediately attracted me. I imagined Africa as a continent on the other side of the world, where life and culture are different than here in Europe. As a continent where in a way time stops and important things are the ones that really matter.

A smile you give to a fellow human being, kind words and greetings. Getting to know new friends as well, sharing stories and experiences. It seems to me that this is exactly what I found in "our" village of Mazembe. I find it difficult to briefly describe my experience in Malawi. I was there for 9 weeks and during that time a lot of things happened that I can't describe, I can't put into words. So many different feelings and joys, so many new experiences and new people are in my life now. I enjoyed teaching the kids in the morning and in the afternoons. It wasn't just me teaching them stuff, they are the ones who also taught me how to say things in Chitonga, games to play in my free time, and how nice it is to share things with others. I'm very happy that I took that step - stepped into the unknown and bought a plane ticket and actually went somewhere I had wanted for a long time. The experience was unforgettable and I am sincerely grateful to have been able to be part of the group, part of ELA, for a while. I will be happy to return. **DAŠA FERŠ**



I don't know either how or where to start my three-month African story.

It's amazing how very kind, open, smiling people Malawians are. I was greeted every day with a smile on my face. They were even happy when the other volunteers girls and I learnt some of their language. So we greeted them in Chitonga and made them laugh as we learned new words and expressions.

I will never forget the sincere smiles of the children as they ran into my arms and squeezed me. They just hugged me to themselves and called my name "Aida".

They had sparks in their eyes, which boiled with joy when it was time to go to ELA's workshops. Kids are really amazing. They know how to play, go crazy and be just children, but on the other hand they are very responsible little creatures. When the little girl, about 5 years old, brought her 14-day-old brother on his back, wrapped in traditional cloth, and it wasn't hard for her to take care of him that made everyone speechless! They take care of the younger children, help each other, divide a piece of orange into 10 parts, so that even the youngest ones get something. I even saw a full moon rising, that mighty orange ball rising from the lake, brushing my teeth under the starry sky, you just look straight ahead and see millions of stars and glimpses. This is just a brief description of my story. In fact, in the village of Mazembe, I have gotten another family, a family of wonderful children and people that I miss endlessly and to whom I will gladly return. This is just the beginning of my Malawian story. "Tionanengi sonu sonu" (I am coming soon) **AJDA REHBERGER**