

# MalawiLink

## The Cashman Family in Malawi

john@malawilink.org  
robyn@malawilink.org  
www.malawilink.org

### Getting back in the swing

Well, here we are back in Malawi and on the face of it, little may have appeared to have changed over the last few months, and yet life feels very different. We have just come back from a lovely month or so in the UK seeing family and friends and are now settling



A water-spout on lake Malawi triggered by lake flies—one of the amazing sights of Malawi

If there is one lesson that we as a family seem to need reminding of—it is that life is not meant to be necessarily easy! Fulfilling one’s calling or vocation may mean plenty of struggles rather than smiles, and the measure by which we manage to enjoy ourselves or make ourselves as comfortable as possible, should not be the yardsticks of success.

ing in now getting some sleep at night and considering her options how best to use the extra time that she will soon have during the week as Rachel starts three mornings per week of nursery.

#### NEWS IN BRIEF

We had a wonderful time back in the UK in July catching up with friends and family

Settling back into life in Malawi has proved more difficult than ever before

We are struggling to try and make a game plan for life’s next chapter here, not knowing how long that will be for

Hannah and Rachel continue to grow and thrive and provide wonderful happiness and fun

To be honest, it has taken us by surprise at how challenging this has proved. Now we are committed to staying in Malawi for the foreseeable future, it seems harder than ever to try and discern realisable goals and continue moving forward, rather than just settling for simply just passively getting through the humdrum of daily living.

Despite the introspection, we are however incredibly blessed. Hannah and Rachel are well and thriving. Hannah and Dad are working on a new tree house, whilst Rachel happily flounces around telling anyone who will stop to listen - all about her “big girl’s pants” and her new found success in accelerated potty training. Robyn is rejoic-

#### CURE’s Aims in Malawi

To provide excellence in orthopaedic care to the children of Malawi.

To assist in training orthopaedic surgeons and nurses in Malawi

To deliver holistic and comprehensive care to patients and their families—physically, emotionally and spiritually

To eventually become largely self financing by devoting 8 in-patient beds and 20% of its work to treating adult private patients, and thus to underwrite the costs of the children’s work—“adults pay a fee so children walk free”

### The service



Post operative patients - smiles and uncomplaining

Work for John continues to be busy with both trying to maximise on hospital earnings for adult private patients whilst trying to treat as many Children as possible. Finances in the hospital continue to be tight on a day to day basis, but the work goes on. John has been greatly helped by the arrival of a new senior trainee from the UK, who happens to be an old friend. Rick Gardner has arrived from Bristol and is

proving a great help and encouragement. We also have a more junior volunteer from Liverpool come to work for 4 months, Dr Abigail Vooght. She has also been a wonderful assistance and has been able to make a great positive impact in the hospital. We were also delighted to have Mr Gwyn Evans with us over the summer period. Gwyn, recently retired from Oswestry in the UK, is one of the most eminent and



modest children's orthopaedic surgeons in Britain and it has been an enormous help to us over the holiday season covering leave, helping with teaching and sharing his immense wisdom with us.

Training continues to be a major part of John's job. As well as teaching medical students and specialist orthopaedic nurse surgeons (Clinical Officers), he is striving to continue nationally training paramedical staff in treating clubfeet, whilst gearing up for hosting a regional course on knee surgery for surgeons from 10 surrounding African nations, which is due to start in the second week of October. He is also organising a training day at the national Malawi Orthopaedic Association conference later this month and is going to help run a Cerebral Palsy course for physiotherapists next year.

Despite the challenges, every day at CURE continues to seem a daily privilege. He is surrounded and supported by a wonderful group of Malawian colleagues and friends. The courage and resilience of the children and families he works with never fails to deeply move him. Just last week he had to amputate a 9 year old child's leg above the knee for a horribly aggressive cancer. The very next day the young lad was laughing and cheerfully planning an early return to wheelchair football with his mates. Despite years of practice—it is difficult to remain composed on one of our daily ward rounds. - only a few visitors or staff manage it!

**Major limb reconstruction work following bone and joint infection occupies much of our work at CURE**



## The return



**Rachel enjoying her 2nd birthday in July in Scotland**

We have been so touched by the thoughtfulness and generosity of so many shown to us in the last year, especially from friends and family back home. The kind generosity of so many in sponsoring John's bike race last year is really now paying dividends. The third operating theatre has been completed and is being fitted out and the physiotherapy wing construction is well underway. In a difficult general financial climate, these developments have sustained and encouraged us all at CURE.

What next—well mainly work., but not all of that is graft! Wonderful humour and vitality are strangely juxtaposed to incredible suffering and poverty. As John stopped briefly outside a shop this week in the centre of Blantyre, he was faced with a bewildering range of possibilities through the open window, before even having a chance to get out of the car: These included—the occasion to buy an 8p car parking ticket, the opportunity to get a broken bicycle fixed, the chance to buy 5kg of frozen king prawns (from Mozambique— having probably spent an unhappy 36hours in a hot minibus) or the opportunity of purchasing 5 tones of top-soil. Well it certainly beats internet shopping or Sainsburys for sheer entertainment and variety!

On reflection the encounter did present a metaphor for living here—wonderful opportunities for good at every turn, beset with many unnecessary diversions and pitfalls for the unwary. We simply need to strive for discernment, discipline and vision in equal measure to continue to make the most of what we have been given for the greater good. I suppose life here is not so different to that in the UK, we perhaps have just the luxury of less cluttered lives to give it more considered thought than we used to.

Thank you once again for all your ongoing interest and support for CURE and our work here.

With our love, thanks and very best wishes,

*John, Robyn, Hannah and Rachel*

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**Paul and Viv Nicholson, 43 Partis Way, Newbridge, Bath. BA1 3QQ**