

# The King and the Oak Tree

## PROLOGUE

'Hi, Mary, I see your Dad's started a new charity – The William Stewart Hope for the Hopeless Foundation. I must e mail him on Monday and ask more about it.'

This was a message, in early April, 2017, from one of my father's students, a friend of mine, too.

I replied: 'I hope Dad isn't including me in that,' to which she replied: 'I shall find out more about it, Mary.'

I thought to myself: 'What has my father got himself into now?' And scoped his facebook page.

Later that day, I messaged our friend: 'I think it's a worldwide movement, of which Dad is a part. He hasn't spoken to me about it but I suspect that his task was to send Bibles to Malawi.'

And so dropped to earth the acorn which would very soon see an oak tree, as my father described it, flourish and spread its branches across the miles to Africa until, four years later, it developed a canker at its roots and, to me and so many others, it died.



## CHAPTER 1 – 2017

When I googled, I saw 'Hope for the Hopeless' in this, that and the other country, and my heart sank. Eventually I phoned my father and asked him what it was all about.

At first, he was quite nonchalant and not a little defensive at my questioning. A tutor of counsellors, many of his online students were from overseas, including Levison Mlambya, from Malawi, who had approached the Institute for whom my father tutored, had been granted a bursary and was assigned to my father for his first course and then a subsequent diploma. They had continued their correspondence, and it transpired that LM, as I shall refer to him from now, had been telling him about the poverty levels in Malawi and had asked if there were any place in the UK which sold second-hand Bibles. That's the photo I'd seen on facebook – LM on his knees in supplication in front of a pile of new Bibles my father had sent to Malawi.

### **Levison failing to control tears after receiving the first 16 Bibles from William Stewart.**



My mother had died five years previously, and my father and I had had the time to rekindle a close relationship and so it was almost inevitable that I would become involved, particularly because I have legal and commercial experience and have run successful campaigns.

My first task was to investigate, as much as I could, about Malawi, and about LM. I was disconcerted to see something about LM which didn't hang together, but I could make a case why it did not. My late brother, in the States, as good if not a better detective, also came across it, and rang me, bellowing down the phone that the guy was a scammer and insisted on having LM's e mail address. I wouldn't give it, and that was the end of the relationship between my brother and me, save for an e mail I wrote to him when he was on his deathbed, two years later. That phone call did spur me on to complete the investigation, however, and to get stuck into helping launch the Foundation properly.

My first task was to raise the profile from a single facebook page and work out the best means of PR for the Foundation – and, as soon as practicable, to ditch the word 'Hopeless' which, although it had, and still has, meaning in Malawi, would not necessarily be looked on favourably in Western countries, particularly the UK.

It was hard graft; an intensive learning curve on how people lived in such a poor country as Malawi – what they didn't have, much more than that which they did; making contacts; working out how to, or whether to, get items out to the country; how to fund, and fundraise; which friends would support; how to overcome prejudice. I lived and breathed the red African earth, for months.

The learning was not without its humorous moments. My father had told a few of his other students and one, a guy in Scotland, had shown great and genuine interest in helping. One day I had a phone call from Dad: 'Mary, help — I think I might have made a mistake. I said to J\*\*\*\*\* that he should become Quartermaster and he's taken me seriously and he's so proud of his title. What can we do?'

OK, how to extricate him from that? I emailed the guy and suggested that, rather than the title Quartermaster, he would perhaps like to be the Scottish Coordinator and help me. He agreed, and said he wanted to learn from me. Except that he really didn't and battle after battle ensued as he wanted to act unilaterally and that ran the risk of the whole developing structure going under.

I asked him whether he could help me by listing as many theme parks as possible, so that I could contact them to see if they would donate some ponchos used for water rides, to give to the children who were walking to school in the pouring rain, in the rainy season, under banana leaves for shelter, if they were lucky.

Not hearing anything for some time, I emailed him; kept getting fobbed off, so started to get a bit shirty. 'Just give me the list you have so far, J\*\*\*\*\*, and we can see where we're going.'

At the end of some days of garble, I realised that he had e mailed the places himself, which was, in itself, OK, until it became apparent that he had asked the major theme park in Scotland for....plastic bags. The woman at the theme park, who had been puzzled by the time I got to her, thought it was very funny and she actually sent a good few ponchos with a message to say come back in the next season and she would allocate many more....which she did.

J\*\*\*\* then started becoming belligerent and my father had to step in and put an end to his Foundation status, which produced unnecessary venom directed towards Dad.

Towards the end of 2017, one of my local acquaintances, Sarah Black, stepped into the breach; she had some great ideas, and I will never take that away from her. We worked closely together through 2018 when we gave her the title Fundraising Team Coordinator, and into 2019.

One of the problems I'd encountered was the sending out of money and goods to Malawi.

Early on, when thinking about the forwarding of items, I'd suddenly been struck by the fact that my house, and that of my father, could end up looking like a warehouse, if we weren't very careful. And in any case, taking advice from other charities connected with Africa, and especially with Malawi, it became evident that it was far better to try to fundraise and send the money, so that Malawian businesses, and the economy, could benefit.

There were some occasions where an appeal for goods was necessary, though. My first appeal was A Case for Pencils.

LM had sent me a photo of himself with some boys that he'd found braving very thorny Buffalo bushes to try to catch a mouse to sell. Primary schools in Malawi

are free to attend, but if kids haven't got a pencil and notebook, they are unable to go to school, so they dip in and out, sending their academic status back.

I made up two boxes, with the photo of the boys on the front, and an explanation, and the Librarian in our local library allowed me to put one there. Similarly, a pub in one of the other villages took another box. The response was incredible – people donated all sorts of stationery items and, as importantly, they became aware of what life was like for so many Malawian children.



My father had, in the meantime, found a good delivery company, and we both used it to send out items donated at appeals and other things which folks had given, particularly in my father's own area. Although sometimes it was hard for both of us to balance the goodwill of people with the cost of sending, and the fact that we still preferred to send funds.

I racked my brains to try and find a reasonable way of sending out money. Banks

took too much, both at the UK and at the Malawian ends. Malawi was disadvantaged in that it did not have Paypal and, despite communication with Paypal, I could not get further in that respect. In the end, we plumped for Western Union as the cheapest and quickest way of sending funds.

Much of my time was taken up learning about Malawi; how poor the country is; the problems with girls having to miss school when they had periods; girls running the risk of early marriage because their families may be too poor to keep them at home and the risks to the girls of falling pregnant at very young ages with attendant medical problems that childbirth could bring; the seasons; what grew and what didn't in Malawi; the school system, primary schools being free, but secondary needing to be paid for.

One of my dear friends, now departed this earth, was John Curtis who had lived in Africa for over forty years and run a business there. I picked his brains remorselessly, and he was my guiding light during those first few frenetic months.

In fact, I remember that the first thing I asked him was how to stop all the flowery language which LM was using in messages with me. John said that I should just tell him straight and that would put a stop to it. I did, and John was right. JC became one of the main supporters of the Foundation. But so did many other people, friends of mine, and friends of my father and people who learned what we were doing.

I found that, on social media, I had to overcome a certain amount of cynicism, but that quickly dissipated as more and more information went into posts. For example, we would post photos of items sent; LM would then post photos of the items being distributed. Folk started to feed back positively to us – they could see where their donations were going.

The next task was to develop a website. My father's friend and website designer, Graham Irwin, who lives in Italy, was pressganged into service and I'm sure, at the beginning, that he regretted it, as I was forever emailing him, asking this and that, especially when I was having trouble with any technicalities. But Graham was patience personified and a pleasure to work with. He grasped the whole concept of the Foundation straight away and was able to make suggestions for the enhancement of the Foundation on the website.

The first iteration of the website was a little rudimentary, as we didn't, at that

stage, have much to put on it. But as time went on, we were able to add to it and, with Graham's professionalism, it became a very good resource for people to see exactly what we were all about, where Ibuluma was; what had been achieved and what was planned.

LM set out to register the Foundation in Malawi, while my father and I put our heads together to come up with a logo. The first one was rejected by the Malawian authorities because we had the Malawian flag colours; the second one quickly became dated and, later, at the beginning of 2020, with a refresh of the website came the new logo, designed by Mr Banda in Malawi and depicting the Foundation's initials in the centre of a sunflower, the flower having huge significance for our family as it was the name given to our late sister, Jeannie, who had Down's Syndrome, and it represented light and hope. By this time, we had managed to ditch the 'hopeless' part of the title, and so the Foundation became The William Stewart Foundation. Initially, being a self-effacing man, my father had been very reluctant to have his name in the Foundation's title, but it's a given in Malawi that anyone who enables something has their name on the project. LM insisted that the Centre in Ibuluma, where he is based, should be called the Margaret and Jean Stewart Resource Centre, after my mother and sister.



But back to 2017. In September the Foundation was registered as a Non-Governmental Organisation with charitable status. We three – LM, my father and I – had decided that a NGO would be preferable to a Community Based Organisation so that it could spread its work as far as it would be able to go in the country. LM had made several journeys to Capital Hill, the Government offices in Lilongwe, from May onwards, and threatened that he would camp in their offices if they did not get a move on.

Also in the Autumn, the first harvest was planted, and it was an extremely exciting time to see the fields of maize, soya beans and groundnuts.



The first lessons – knitting – began. Two ladies joined the Malawian team to teach the skill, and not only were the girls encouraged, but the boys too, on the basis that William himself knitted, sewed and crocheted. My father sent out balls of wool and knitting needles. Very quickly, the children began producing wonderfully worked items.



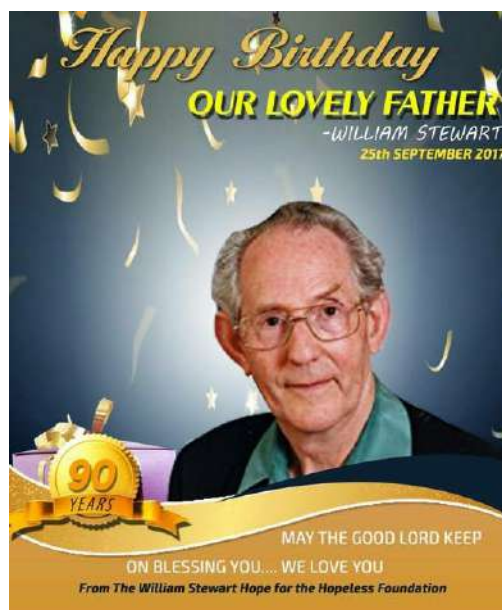


Importantly, at this time, land was gifted by the Chiefs so that the Resource Centre could be built.

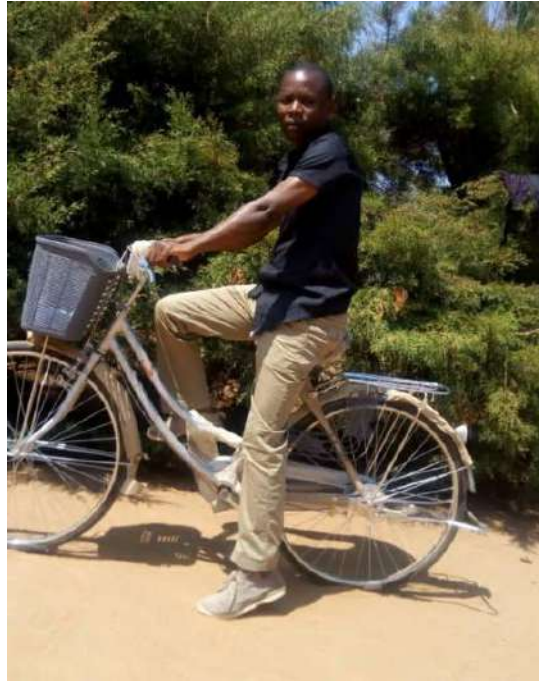
My father's 90th birthday was at the end of September and a party was held for him in Ibuluma. A poem was read to him, clearly and beautifully, by 10-year-old Debora Munthali, one of the 200 orphans in the Ibuluma villages; a 4th year student at Chambo Primary School.

*Today is William's birthday  
He's lived for ninety years  
The King who always thinks of us  
And wipes away our tears  
We're far from you, William  
We wish that we were near  
But we'll shout 'Happy Birthday'  
We're sure that you will hear  
We shout hooray for a lovely day  
And thank our God above  
For sending you to be our friend  
And showing us your love.  
On behalf of my fellow orphans in Malawi, I say Happy Birthday William Stewart -  
Hip, Hip, Hooray*

Hundreds of students came to the party, which was also attended by the Principal Education Officer for the area. Over 60 orphans who were present received gifts from the Foundation.



In order to go on outreaches, to see some of the elderly people, some of whom were disabled or infirm, LM had been using a child's bike hired from someone in the village, or else he hired bicycle taxis. In August 2017, although we publicised it as 'a well-wisher', my father sent money so that LM could buy himself a proper bike which, of course, greatly helped. Later, early in 2020, this was superseded by a motorbike, donated by the church in the village where Sarah's parents live and after she had told the congregation about the Foundation. The motorbike was such a great help, for the areas to which the push bike couldn't go.



There had been a noticeable increase in the goodwill shown towards the Foundation from people connected with my father's own Church, and in his neighbourhood, and through his tutoring, and also an increase amongst my own

friends, acquaintances and in my own area. The hard work in 2017 was bearing fruit. My father likened the Foundation to an oak tree; sprouting quickly from the smallest of acorns, and beginning to spread its branches wide.

One of my father's long term friends and co-authors, Dr John Gunzburg, in Melbourne, Australia, who was a great supporter of the Foundation and its work, and is an author and painter, donated several books, beautifully illustrated, and several of his paintings, to raise funds.

Two paintings by John Gunzburg taken from his book *May The Lord Shine Upon You*



Approaching Storm



Journey to Where?

## CHAPTER 2 – 2018

The new year saw a hive of activity, here in the UK and in other parts of the world where support was given – from the States, through Spain, to Australia.

My father paid for LM to take his driving test, first the theory and then the practical in early March, which involved a tortuous couple of days, but we were all delighted when the good news came through that he had passed with flying colours.

In April, the land was cleared of boulders, tree stumps and vegetation, and two latrines were dug.

Early in 2018, we 'hitched a lift' on the Smileawi container so that some boxes of donated materials and a Singer sewing machine (which became very well used) could reach Ibuluma. Smileawi, run by Vicky and Nigel Milne, is a great charity. They are both dentists and annually go to Malawi, with other dentists and dental nurses, to provide free dental treatment.

We then heard about the imminent inception of the Bananabox Trust, a charity with a warehouse in Dundee to which donors could take boxes which, when the warehouse was full, would be loaded on to a container. We said that we wished for a 'long and fruitful' liaison. We sent as many boxes via the charity as was financially viable, conscious that my father was paying not only for the transportation, but at the Malawian end, too, when LM would hire a lorry to pick up the goods after their long sea journey. Whenever the container came in, the stress both sides built up, because of the distance needed to travel to the drop off point in Ekwendeni, and the problem of hiring a lorry. But we managed, and there was always great excitement when the container was unloaded, and then when its contents arrived at Ibuluma.

In April, an Easter party was held for about 100 children. We had sent out gifts of soap, sweets and snacks which people had given; there was Whittard of Chelsea chocolate drink (about which there is a story) and Sarah made up an Easter colouring/ word search activity for the children. There were plenty of games for them to enjoy.

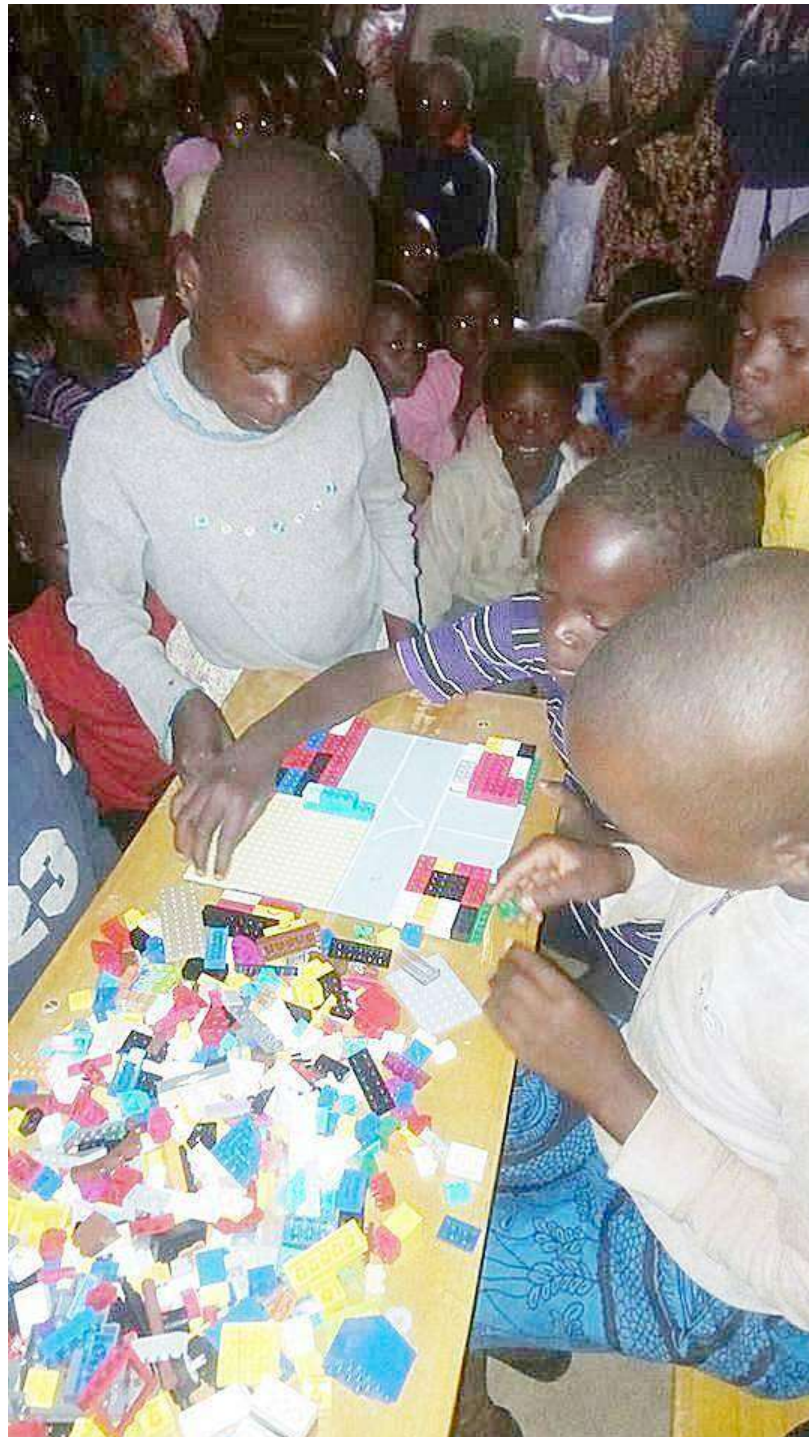
The story about the hot chocolate is a strange one. It was a mystery then, and so it remains.

LM contacted me to say that a parcel had turned up addressed to him, and that it contained tins of hot chocolate of various flavours. It came from Whittard of Chelsea. I emailed them and the most delightful correspondence ensued. Eventually it was determined that the consignment had been intended for a chap in Seoul and how it fetched up in Malawi, let alone Ibuluma, nobody had any idea. But Whittard was so taken with the story of the Foundation that not only did the company let the Foundation keep the tins, it said it would arrange for more to be sent and it kept its word. As a consequence, when, later on, the Foundation kitchen was built, it was very obvious who it would be named for – The Whittard Kitchen.



My father had started writing Newsletters to the ever-increasing number of Foundation supporters, and in 2018 I wrote the first of Nkhazi's Newsletters (later changed to Nasenje for the local dialect; both meaning Aunt).

A little later in April, there was a Lego party for the kids, Balfron nursery having sent a lot of Lego. It was the first time that the children had seen it, but pretty soon they had cottoned on and were busy making things from it.



It was here that we first met Anock, a little boy who had no blanket, but was given one my father had made – the coat of many colours. Anock became one of the poster boys for the Foundation – he featured in the first of trifold brochures I made - and the story of he and his two siblings, being looked after by their very sickly mother since the father had died, was told in LM's The Story of Anock.



In May, the profile of the Foundation was raised when, at the annual agricultural show in one of our West Stirlingshire villages, Balfron's nursery children won first place with their wonderful display of artwork depicting life in rural Malawi; paintings of African design and colour, and necklaces in African colours. Some of the pieces I had written for our local Stirling Observer newspaper can also be seen here.



In the UK, we ran a campaign to raise money for brickmaking which was very successful, and in June brickmaking began, the aim of the brickmakers being to make 2500 per day. Clay was dug out, bricks made and ferried, with bags of sand, to the site, by villagers – adults, and lots of excited children who were on their school holidays, and the kiln-making began.



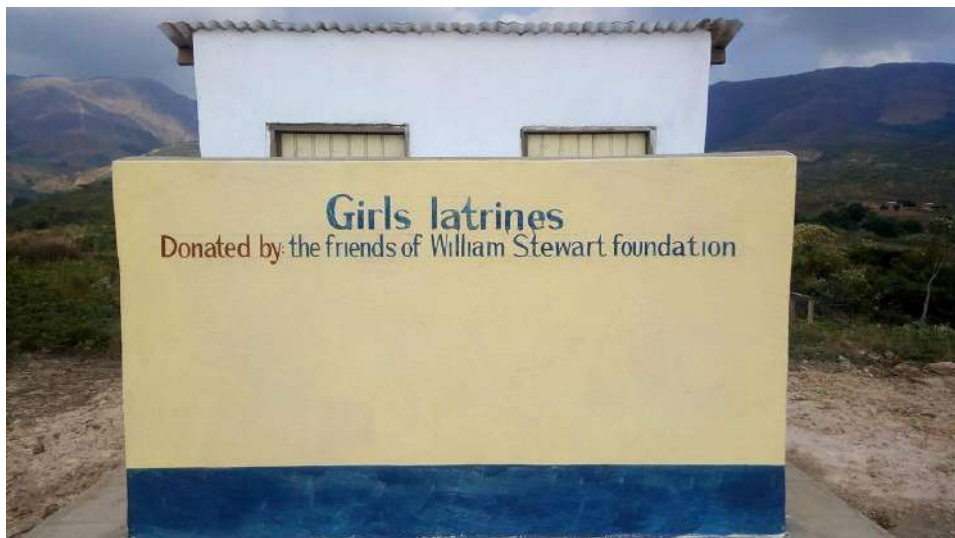
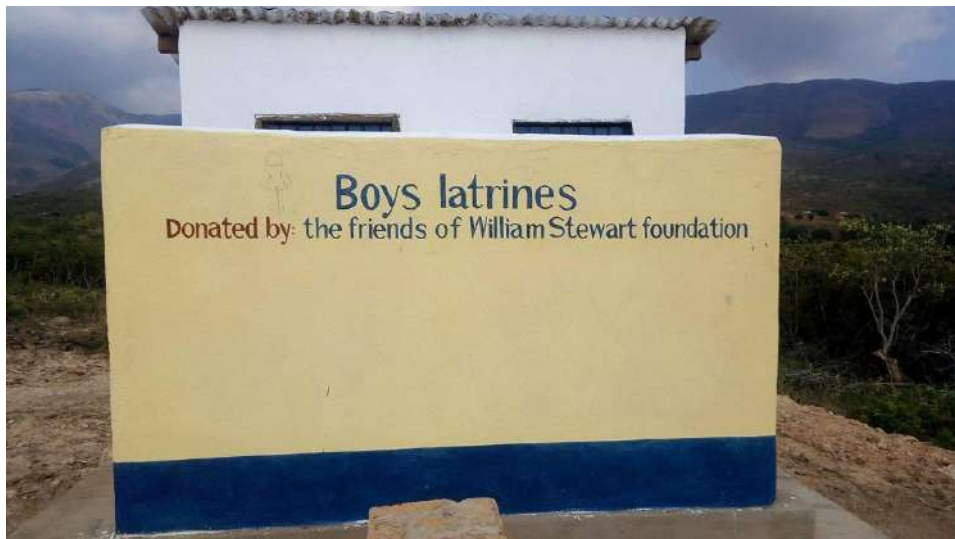




This is one of the kilns which I always thought reminded me of a Roman viaduct. In this one there were 19 ports, extended later to 21, in which purpose fires from purpose grown eucalyptus would be lit in all-night firing, to bake the bricks. Grass was put on the top, and when the grass caught light, the bricks were fired. The whole thing would then be left for a fortnight to cool down. The second kiln had 20 ports.



From August through to October, building happened. First the latrine blocks, then the kitchen and stores.



The first harvest happened round about the same time and yielded 50 x 50kg of maize, which was a great result. The soya beans and groundnuts had still to be harvested. This photo is of one of the harvesters, Blessings, in front of a chimphanga – a grain store.



The chiefs were so impressed by the happenings at Ibuluma, that they gifted more land to the Foundation.

LM continued his outreaches, to the elderly, and to families in need. He sent me photos and videos and I put them up on social media and my father put some of them in his Newsletters. The word was spreading far and wide.



It was around this time that I started to get friend requests from people in Malawi. LM was diffident about this and suggested that I didn't befriend. I understood his reasoning, but, after discussion with Dad, I decided to go by intuition, and accept several of the requests. And I'm glad that I did, because most of the people are still my Malawian friends to this day. Many of them ran NGOs or CBOs themselves and did a lot of good work in their areas of the country.

My father and I often talked about this and could see that the Foundation, when it was strong enough, would be able to extend to others – the branches of the oak tree spreading. Most of the Malawian friends knew this, too; they could see what was happening so quickly in Ibuluma and were content to wait. In 2020, in fact, Dad and I reckoned that the extension would be able to start in 2021, in a small way at first, but with the potential to grow. That was an exciting thought for us and for LM. But....to quote Scotland's bard: "the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry".

The first feeding of children happened in October 2018. It was decided that the Skills Shed, still to be finished, was safe enough to provide shelter for the children; we had food grown in the Foundation gardens, and there was no sense in waiting. The children had been coming every day to see the progress and were hugely excited. So, ladies prepared, in massive pots, nsima, a sort of porridge made from maize and a staple in Malawi, and 183 children came, to be fed in two sittings, the older children helping the younger ones and assisting with food preparation. The Foundation had officially become 'their place'.





This photo is of an eleven-year-old girl, feeding her little sibling. They had recently lost their parents, and the Foundation was now their 'safe place'.



And this photo became symbolic of the fun to be had at the Centre.



In October, we started preparing for Christmas and the party which would be held for the children. The second container had left Scotland and was carrying many items of children's clothing including uniform kindly donated by the local schools, as well as Bibles and blankets. More and more people had come forward to help. We'd run an appeal for gloves and hats, and it surprised many folks to learn that African nights and early mornings can be very cold. Some people were starting to knit for the children, too.

Also in October, a Foundation choir had been formed, which the kids thoroughly enjoyed.



It was decided that the temporary skills shed was so well built that it could be used to build the permanent one and in December, that work began.



On to the long-awaited Christmas party where, for the first time ever, Santa made an appearance. 400 children came; half were housed in a tent which had been erected and half in what was now Sophie's Skills Shed, named after Sophie, a little girl in one of the villages who, with her mother, Tamara, had raised money for the Foundation by holding a Sparkling Tea Party. Sophie had decided that the Foundation was the charity she wished to raise funds for.



Before the day of the party, LM had gone to Lilongwe with his wife and daughter. There was a special reason for this. He had had to keep dropping in and out of university because of lack of fees, the same as many students have to do in high school, colleges and universities.

When he mentioned this to my father, Dad paid for him to continue with his studies, which he did by torchlight in the evenings after the day was spent on Foundation work. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Education. We were all delighted, of course, and most especially my father, who had no hesitation in sending him the necessary for the family to go to the capital – the first time LM's wife and daughter had been there. By this time, Dad was sending LM a stipend and paying for his daughter's education at nursery. I think it was round about this time when LM started to call my father the King because I'd shown him photos of my father and me sitting on the thrones in Stirling Castle when, in 2013, Dad had come to Scotland for a visit. It was probably about the end of 2018 when LM started to call my father 'Dad', too.

I should stress here that LM was always concerned that 'the King' would not have enough money for himself to live on. I was always at pains to assure him that my father did and wouldn't leave himself short. It's a good thing that we don't have a crystal ball; I was way off the mark. As I was, too, when LM said that my siblings and I were as brothers and sister to him.

In the UK, we had started fundraising for chickens and goats. If folk contributed, a chicken or a goat would be named after them. We had so many people whose names ran about Ibuluma on two legs or four.

I wrote a Nkhazi Newsletter for the children's Christmas, giving them all the news, and teaching them 'Old MacDonald' and 'Baby Shark', which they loved, and sent us a video where they were singing it.

On 31<sup>st</sup> December, there was the Grand Opening of the Foundation by the Group Village Head, the event being attended by Foundation trustees, the other Chiefs, the Primary Education Adviser, members of the police, clergy, social welfare, teachers and many more people who came to witness what was an historic occasion in the Ibuluma villages. 600 children also came.

This photo is of the Group Village Head, the Senior Chief who wears the hat of authority, being presented with a watch. Previously my good friend John Curtis had sent a watch for LM and then one for LM's wife. Then John thought that the Chief shouldn't go without a watch and sent one over for him, with which the Chief was absolutely delighted.



The children received gifts; the youngest received cuddly toys, which they had never even seen before. A supporter of the Foundation had sent out a lot of her own precious cuddlies and was delighted to see them being held so tightly here.



## CHAPTER 3 – 2019

The year started with the distribution of the yellow ponchos which had been sent by the theme park mentioned earlier. These gifts prompted a letter of thanks from the Head Teacher, Mr Nyondo. In fact, the feedback from the teaching staff at the local Chambo Primary was very encouraging – that the children were happier and doing well academically, socially and generally, in respect of their physical and mental wellbeing.



A skills weekend was held in February; some of the children learning bricklaying; some knitting or using the sewing machine. They were all fed. The young boy learning bricklaying is Anock, looking smart in his sweatshirt from one of our local primary schools – a far cry from that thin, dusty, shoeless little fellow who had had no blanket.





Also in February, the elderly folk had a party and were given gifts of clothing and shoes. Those who were able, travelled to the Centre; 47 who were just too old or too disabled were given their gifts by outreach.

The elderly thought that it was great. This was their place, too, where they could meet and chat together.

The lady sitting on the right of the photo was the Gogo (grandmother) to whom LM had given gifts in 2017; then, she was well into her eighties and had cried when LM had cycled up on the child's pushbike to give her gifts of soap, sugar and salt.



The second year's crops were planted, and vegetables were growing well in the dambo – wetlands, adjacent to the Chambo River.



The hen house and goat kraal were next to be built, as the UK team were recruiting so many sponsors of chickens and goats. The Malawian team was hampered by Cyclone Idai, but eventually the wind died down, the rain stopped, and the sun came out, and the Holligan Hen House was finished, named after a couple who had been very generous towards the Foundation –Margaret and Allan Holligan. Sadly, Allan died at much the same time as the Hen House was finished, but his name lives on in Malawi.



The goat kraal was finished and called The Hamilton and Smith Goat Kraal, after Pauline Hamilton – my late and lovely honorary sister – and Anita and John Smith, all of whom donated so generously to the Foundation.



30 chickens were moved into their new home, and another 12 the following week, with four left in temporary quarters as they were sitting on eggs. The children learned all about chickens and how to look after them.

In April, we had another great gift, this time from the property company Chestertons. Sarah had seen an advert from Chestertons, contacted them and the MD, impressed with the work the Foundation was doing, sent two boxes of ponchos. I had referred, in an earlier Newsletter, to the children wearing the theme park's yellow ponchos as 'daffodils', so now we had 'crocuses', too.

Also in April, there was an Easter party, where 550 children came, to play, to eat and to be given gifts of soap, exercise books, pens, pencils, rulers, clothes, blankets and torches. A handful of children came from 17 km away.



The team realised that most funders insisted that there be a UK charitable arm and so decided that there had to be a UK charity set up to support the Foundation for the purposes of fundraising and raising awareness, with its own bank account and therefore with the facility of registering for such things as Gift Aid, previously denied to us and which, in itself, can be a meaningful addition to funds.

I had the help of a friend, who has a SCIO for her own charity, to advise on the complexities of setting up a SCIO ( Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation) from scratch and the process started in early 2019, Sarah and I working very hard together so that all the documentation was in order to make it happen. It was a red-letter day in May when we got the news that the UK charity had been registered – Friends of the William Stewart Centre was born. Sarah Black was the lead trustee of four.

At the beginning of May, LM started agricultural lessons for the children. 200 turned up, so he split them into groups, teaching them how to use hoes and picks and how to make ridges for planting – the new generation of farmers!



When, in the UK, we had done our incredibly successful bricks appeal, we thought we'd have the names on a plaque, but there were far too many. Then the idea came – the walls of the Skills Shed were bare. So have the names of donors, or those whom folks wished to remember with names living on in Malawi, on the walls. The children were having art lessons, so it was decided to combine, and let the children paint the names.



The first was that of Emma Buchanan, a young girl in Balfron who died from cystic fibrosis, aged 15, in 2013. The Balfron High School had had links with Malawi, and Emma, had she been granted more time, had wanted to go to Malawi. Later, the Library at the Centre was named after her.

On a day off for the kids because of elections, they carried on their artistry in the Skills Centre. They got the names of some of the people slightly wrong which caused hilarity in some quarters – especially the name Welly Young – that’s my husband, Willie.



In June, the agricultural students, under the guidance of LM, made the John Curtis Vegetable Garden in honour of John, who had sent out so many bulbs and seeds and had provided so much assistance and support to the Foundation, and especially to me. There were main beds and nursery beds, too, the main beds being split into early maturing and late maturing vegetables, all kept watered by irrigation channels.



Another part of the garden – the potato farm – was bursting with sweet potatoes ready to be lifted.





In the middle of July, LM found that ESCOM (Electricity Supply Company of Malawi) had dropped off poles and equipment and told him that the company would be electrifying the buildings, probably at the end of the month. The Foundation had put in an application for electrification some months before.

This engendered much activity, to get the buildings wired up beforehand. There was no time to fundraise, but my father stepped into the breach again and paid for it. This time we told him that he had no option – we were going to credit him for it – and we did. The deadline was reached, and we'd done it – the kitchen/stores, Skills Shed and the chicken house were all wired in time for the ESCOM deadline. Because of the existence of the Foundation, it meant that electrification also came to the nearby Chambo Primary School and Chambo Health Centre.

Now we had to wait for ESCOM.

In September, LM took twelve students to the gardens for lessons, but more followed, so he let them stay.

When this, and other photos of students happily tending plants and weeding were posted on social media, John Curtis said: 'What I so love about this is the way, in such a short time, these youngsters have changed so much, from being truly hopeless to being so optimistic for the future. This is why we do what we do.'



Most weekends, many, many children came to the Resource Centre, to play games, to learn, and to have food. LM made twenty of them Captains, so that they could help the younger children. There was never any pushing or shoving, or argy bargy, but sometimes the little ones went out of line. This is a photo of one of the Captains, on the left, making sure that the little one was alright.



Here is one of the hundreds of photos I still have on file, showing some of the little 'uns enjoying their meal – usually nsmima, the staple made with maize, with some relish – vegetables from the Foundation gardens. I called the album from which these were taken 'Sunshine Sunday', because it was. Sometimes, children who lived furthest away were encouraged to leave in the afternoon so that they could get home before darkness fell at 6.00 pm, but that was a job and a half, because none of them ever wanted to leave.



In September, the sign went up at the road end, to announce the whereabouts of the Centre; the children thought this was wonderful, because they were on the map.



Also in September, there was a huge birthday party for my father and me; 700 children turned up and were given presents of all sorts of items left from the huge Christmas delivery, and soap and sweets. After lunch, they sang and danced and played games.



September was certainly a busy month. Earlier, LM had bought seven double brickmaking pans, meaning that 14 bricks could be made in one go. Here, there are thousands of bricks ready for the next building on a new piece of ground gifted by the Chiefs.



There was now a Poultry Group, in which the children were responsible for looking after the hens. Children and adults often came to look at the chickens, especially at feeding time. The girl feeding the hens is Deborah Munthali, the same girl who read the poem at William's 90th birthday celebrations.



At the end of October, the artists gathered, and made Sophie's Skills Shed as colourful as could be.



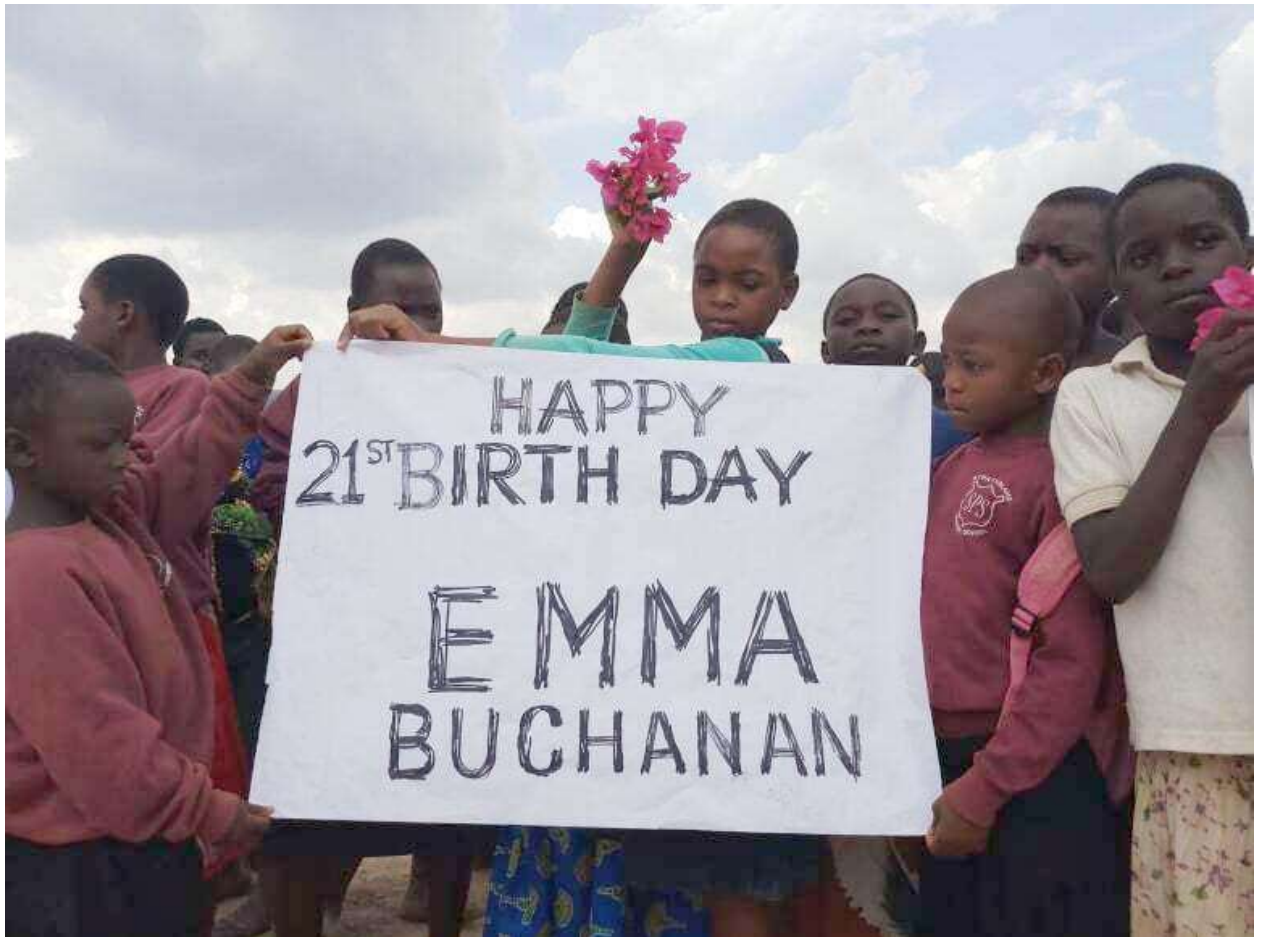
Also, that weekend, a workshop was held in the Skills Shed to educate the girls, and the boys, about life skills, the prevention of HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, and the importance of education for the girls' future.

Many girls, because of poverty, are married off young, or are forced into prostitution and the Foundation's aim was that no girl should be denied further education, either because of poverty per se or because of period poverty which causes so many girls to miss a week's education per month.

So in addition to the health aspect of the workshop, instruction, in the second part of the workshop for the girls, was given in how to make reusable sanitary wear. The girls took so well to using the sewing machine.



On 17th November, which would have been the 21st birthday of Emma Buchanan, after whom the Library is named, a party was held for Emma. The children were all sad that she had wanted to visit Malawi, but they were heartened when they were told that she would be there in spirit. The girls collected hibiscus flowers for her and held banners that they had made. They had a special treat of doughnuts and juice at the party, and they all sang 'Happy Birthday' to Emma.



My father's Newsletter of December told of the name change which would be simply The William Stewart Foundation as now nobody in Ibuluma was regarded as 'hopeless'. He and I had name changes, too, because it was felt that we should be given those in the Chitipa dialect. So Dad became Sekulu instead of Gogo, and I became Nasenje (Aunt) instead of Nkhazi. In my part of the Newsletter, I wrote about accusations of witchcraft still being prevalent in Malawi, and the Foundation's work to dispel those myths. And also that mothers with deformed or disabled children were ostracised. I used the example of my own sister Jeannie, and said that my next Newsletter – the first one from Nasenje – would contain a simplified version for the children.

In the UK, raising money for projects was going well, including fundraising for a Library.

For the run up to Christmas, triggered by something a friend said, I had had the idea of an advent calendar with a difference – showing one of the children, each day from 1st, in a Christmas bauble, with a speech balloon and a few words from the child of the day. The children responded to this well. On 24th I put all the children into one complete advent calendar.



**I am Adijah Msongole**  
I am 10 years old. I am a cheerful girl and I love art which I can do at the Centre. I love the hens, too, and take care of them. Since I started attending activities at the Margaret and Jean Stewart Resource Centre I have been relieved of the pain of orphanhood

On 28th December, there was some wonderful news. The Centre had light! People came from far and wide to see it. It was a great end to 2019.





## CHAPTER 4 – 2020

The year started well. The John Curtis Vegetable Garden was looking lush, and the children were very proud of their horticultural handiwork.

It had become clear that as the number of children coming to the Centre had increased, there was not the room in the Skills Shed to shelter them all, and so it was decided to extend the Shed and make that part of it Emma's Rainbow Library.



In March, the first of the appeals for sponsorship of young people was made for five older girls, all of whom were sponsored quickly, and they went off to Chisenga Day Secondary School, a bit less than 6 km from Ibuluma, although the girls board there, for safety reasons. The sponsors' money covered the girls' fees, living, bedding and items they needed for the school day. The scheme was extended quickly to other children of all ages, and then later included Apprentices, the slightly older boys and girls who would learn trades at the Centre.



Rains hampered the build, but in the second week of April, work was finished. The grand opening of Emma's Rainbow Library which we had envisaged – by Chiefs and with a lot of dignitaries present and, of course, hundreds of children – didn't happen, because of Covid and the need for social distancing, but nevertheless about 50 children, the maximum permitted number, were able to be part of the opening and sat on the verandah and round and about, looking at the books.



In May, there was another large distribution of clothing, including the giving of 500 ponchos from Chestertons. A lot of crocuses danced that day!



The May Newsletter covered the problems which had ensued because of Covid both in Malawi and the UK, but there was also encouraging news. The chicken flock and the goat herd were thriving. I introduced our new Sunflower logo, and spoke about the new Library, giving a little of the background to the rainbow. Emma loved books, and so it was fitting that the Library should be named after her.

At her funeral, the poem 'Look for me in rainbows' was read. A rainbow appeared overhead when her family came out of the Church. She continues to inspire youngsters to read; many of the Ibuluma children had never had a book to read before.

The children kept busy through Covid, tending the gardens, chickens, goats, collecting pumpkins. A group of the girls decided to make face masks and did very well, which was quite amazing as it was only a month earlier that they had learned how to use a sewing machine.

The children were taught how to keep as safe as they could during Covid. This photo shows them measuring the safe distance between them. They were split into groups of 20, and that was a mammoth task most weekends when around 500 children turned up to be fed, and of course they wanted to play, too.



In June, LM met three boys coming back from the market, carrying bundles of the tail ends of sugar cane which had been discarded as not being sugary enough, which they were able to get for free. The boy in the middle is Chisomo Nyondo (he was wearing one of our local schools' sweatshirts). His idea was to divide and plant the pieces of sugar cane, one cutting producing several sugar cane plants.



So he was going to plant 200 sugar cane stems, to harvest 800 sugar cane plants,

sell them at MK150.00 each and get MK120,000.000 so that he could construct a house for his grandmother.

It was an example of how empowered these children were becoming.

Over June/July, the harvest was being tended to. Maize was stoked in June and harvested in July. The first harvest yielded 73 x 50kg bags of maize.





In August, LM paid a visit to Anock – remember, the boy with my father's multi-coloured blanket. We had not been able to appeal for a sponsor for Anock, as we had done with other children, because not only was there Anock, but his two siblings, so to have only one sponsored would have been unfair. But a lady in the UK offered to sponsor the whole family, and this photo shows their joy. Sadly, as can be seen later, in 2021, events took a turn, and Anock's family was affected by the drama.



We had a very busy August. We learned that the nearest borehole, at the Chambo Health Centre, half a mile from the Foundation, was beginning to dry up, meaning that until the rainy season began in December which would raise the water table, people would have to rely on river water, with its risks of typhoid, dysentery and cholera. And, of course, the pandemic made washing in clean water vital. So the quest to have clean water began. I wrote a special Newsletter, explaining the problem. It had a photo of my father on his exercise bike.

Dad was born in Australia, but the family moved back to Scotland when he was a baby. He had always had a hankering to see the country, particularly as his elder brother had moved there many years before. My father suffered from peripheral neuropathy and Parkinsons, so was unable to ride a normal pushbike as he always had done and so decided to buy an exercise bike. He had made several journeys on it already, from John o' Groats to Land's End and back, and around the South of England. In 2016, he had started to cycle to Melbourne, Australia, and it was in August that he decided that everyone should join him in his travels, cycling to raise money for the borehole. I called the project 'Where There's a Will, There's a Well'.

Later in the month, I wrote another Special Newsletter announcing the Race for Water, so that people could walk, cycle, run, whatever, to join my father. This was his introduction:

#### *RACE FOR CLEAN WATER*

*The majority of us, at least in the Western World, don't have to walk far for fresh water. We just turn on the tap and out it flows. Not so in in Rural Northern Malawi where the William Stewart Foundation is located. We hope you will take part in the Virtual Race for Clean Water. Even if you cannot race, you can walk. If you cannot easily walk the distance, remember the example of Colonel Tom who pushed his walker around his garden to raise money for the NHS. If you can't go out, what about climbing up and down the stairs? If you can't do that, what can you do? We would love to hear of the imaginative way in which you took part in this challenge.*

*Thank you for your support and encouragement as I continue my trip to Oz.  
William.*

And people answered his call. People buoyed my father by sending him many messages of support. The appeal really grabbed the attention of people; they walked; ran; cycled and raised money. Sarah's sister Joanne, facing a life-changing operation, decided to walk 100 km to raise money, later upping it to



150km. One day she was even accompanied by a horse (and rider).

My father's blind friend, Tom, his partner Paul, and guide dog Toby, ran, walked and cycled and hired a tandem. Other people involved their children.



I contacted some of the press. I'd had a good relationship with our local Stirling Observer since the campaigning days, and they had run several pieces in the paper about the Foundation. The Sunday Post had an article, as did the heavyweight, the Times, after I contacted one of the reporters. The Alloa Advertiser and the Soldier Magazine responded with good articles, too, and then my former sister-in-law, Susan Surman who is an actress, playwright and author, had a great piece published in one of the Winston-Salem, USA, papers, too. Susan's piece brought a different dimension, because she knew Dad personally and they were still in regular phone communication.

# Scotsman, 93, pedals daily towards £5,000 target to build African well

Mark Macaskill

Most men his age have taken their foot off the pedal. However, William Stewart, a 93-year-old Scotsman who suffers with Parkinson's is determined to "cycle" more than 10,000 miles in aid of poverty-stricken villagers in Malawi.

Stewart has been pedalling daily on a bike machine at his home since 2016. His goal is to raise funds for a new borehole to provide fresh water to villages in Ibuluma, in the north of the African country.

The existing well is too shallow and dries up during the summer, forcing locals to use river water and risk contracting dysentery, typhoid and cholera.

So far, Stewart, who also suffers with peripheral

neuropathy, a condition that causes weakness and pain in his legs and feet as a result of nerve damage, has clocked up 6,250 miles and raised £645 towards a target of at least £5,000.

He aims to pedal 10,500 miles, the distance from his home in Southampton to Melbourne, Australia, where he was born in 1927. His family moved back to Scotland when he was an infant.

"I've increased my sessions from two to three a day," said Stewart. "My weekly distance will be 63.75 miles. I reckon I'll reach Melbourne in March 2022."

"If you have a disability don't let it get you down. It's the things you can do that matter, not what you can't. Age is not the end of the world. It's important to have

a vision, something that drives you."

Stewart is a counselling tutor and in 2015 was assigned by the Institute of Counselling in Glasgow to help Levison Mlambya, a Malawian who had applied for a bursary.

Two years later, the pair set up a charitable foundation in Malawi's Chitipa district to support the elderly and about 700 children, many of whom are orphans. It provides food for the children from homegrown crops.

The borehole is close to the foundation's resource centre but needs to be much deeper and fitted with a solar-powered pump, connected to an electricity supply, with tanks to allow easier irrigation of crops and vegetables. It dries up as the water table drops and locals

have to wait until the rains in December.

Stewart's daughter, Mary Young, from Killearn in Stirlingshire, who helps to run his charity, said: "My father always longed to go back to the land of his birth but has never had the opportunity. Now he is on his way – in his imagination – while he keeps himself fit."

"An efficient borehole will not only help to keep the children safe from coronavirus and prevent them from having so much time away from school because of illness from water-borne diseases, but will also have a profound influence on the wellbeing of, and quality of life in, the whole community."

Stewart's foundation has already raised funds to help build a community centre for the Ibuluma villagers. It is



Stewart on his exercise bike

used to feed the orphans and provide life skills classes.

Donations can be made at [crowdfunder.co.uk/clean-water-in-ibuluma-1](https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/clean-water-in-ibuluma-1)

# Where there's a William...

KATIA MAROUBANKS

A 93-year-old is helping his Killearn-based charity bring clean water to a project in Malawi – by cycling to Australia.

The community of Ibuluma in Malawi's Mlolozi Local Government is in need of clean water. It is one of the poorest in the country, particularly in the dry season, when the water table is too low to reach the shallow borehole.

The regeneration was funded by the Scottish Government and the Wellbeing of Communities (Scotland) Act 2016. Stewart's daughter, Mary Young, has been instrumental in raising the funds.

Now, however, the spirited nonagenarian is hoping to raise several thousand pounds to build a borehole – something he says is the only way to ensure that the children can have clean water to drink, reducing the risk of disease such as cholera and typhoid.

Mary, who is a volunteer for the charity, said: "My father has spent his life in the service of others and he has always been a man of action. He has been instrumental in raising the funds to build a borehole in Ibuluma."



Stewart on his bicycle

## 93-year-old is cycling to Australia for charity

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Stewart on his exercise bike

The borehole is beginning to dry up and until the rains come, there will be just a trickle

By November, over £3000 had been gifted. The new borehole could be dug that year instead of waiting until the following year. The race was certainly on – to have it done before the rainy season started.

In September, schools were able to resume. The children were all pleased to go back, but one of the problems was hygiene. There are four schools in the area, and none had proper facilities for handwashing. The children would be to-ing and fro-ing between the Centre and the schools, and so it was felt that it was vital to try and provide hygiene facilities. Thanks to great supporters, the Foundation was able to provide tapped buckets – and more stationery and masks made by the girls at the Centre, given to all the schools.



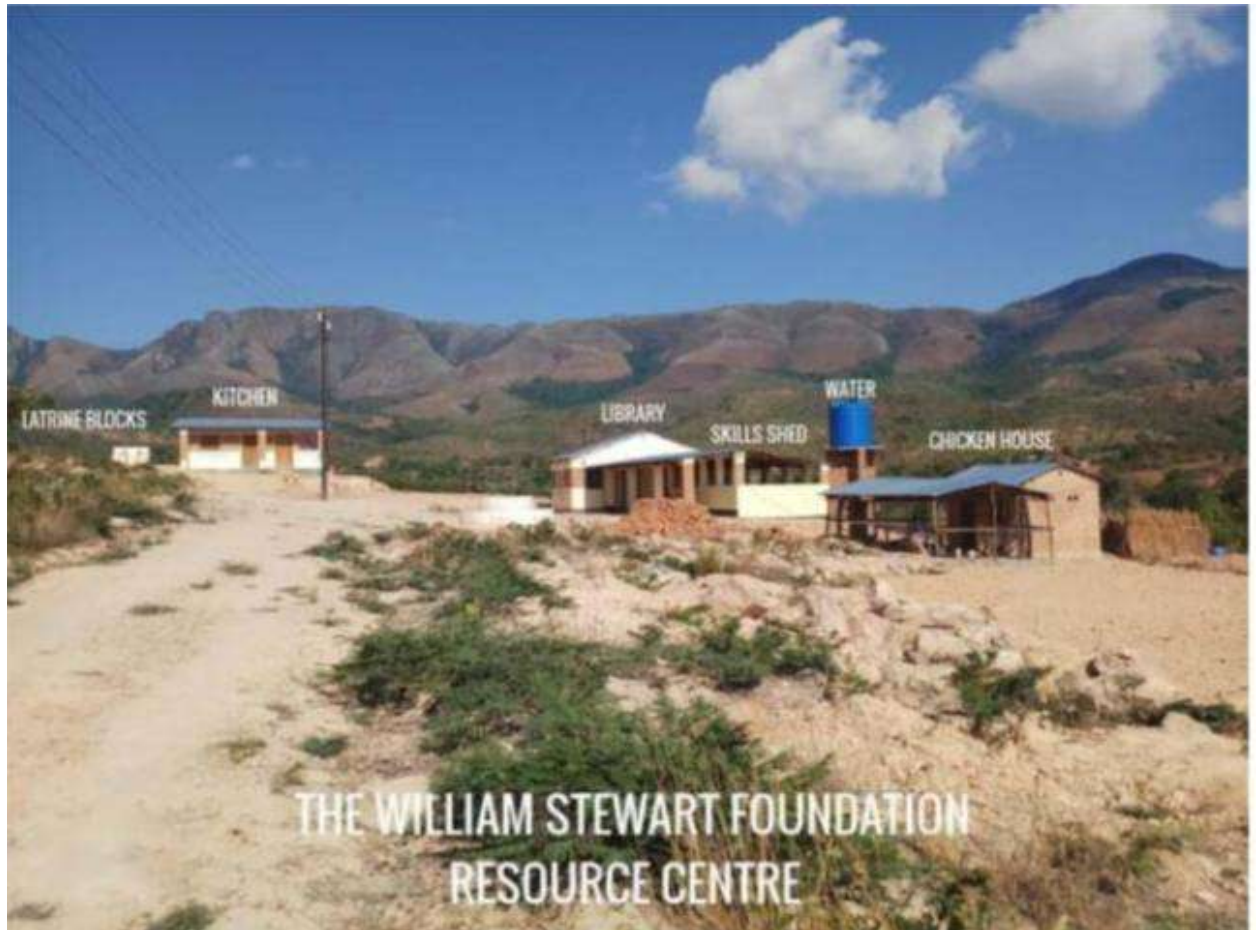
In October, during the school half term, a distribution of clothing was made, including football strips. When teams had been selected, in 2017, the children had named the teams William Stars for the boys' football team and Mary Queens for the girls' netball team. This is the photo of the William Stars in their first complete football strip provided by Dorchester Town Football Club in Dorset, which came through Julian Chenery who runs Wear A Sports Shirt Day, a great enterprise where Julian collects all sorts of sporting gear and sends to people in different countries. The boys were as proud as could be to be given this, their first ever strip.



On 18th November, there was another red-letter day at the Centre. Water!! It took only six weeks, from start to finish, but the rains, and some difficulties, were overcome. The well was dug, to a depth of 50 metres, three standpipes were linked, to make it easier for the community and particularly for the children and a water tank was hoisted.







In December, it was planting time again, and this year, 7 acres of maize were planted, and 2 acres of groundnuts.

Although there were already fruit trees at the dambo, it was decided, now that the Centre had water, to plant fruit trees on a new piece of ground at the Centre and create The Foundation Orchard.

It was an exciting time, as we prepared for Christmas 2020.

However, there were some clouds which had appeared over the horizon.

My father had been very troubled with an extremely painful back for the few weeks before Christmas. He had headed straight for his osteopath, as he usually did, but the visit, and a couple more, had not relieved the pain. And so he had had to park up his bike, when, on his ride, he was still on the Indian Ocean, just past Christmas Island, so technically he had reached Australia.

Another thing which had caused him distress was the by now very evident rivalry

springing up from the feeder charity Friends of the William Stewart Centre. A few weeks before Christmas it had come to a head when another great charity had liaised with us and prepared a piece about the Foundation and its work for its website. I had done a little proof reading, and this had triggered an outburst from Sarah, on email to us all, along the lines of this was her project and she was never allowed to do anything or voice an opinion.

Just before Christmas, facebook announced that I had been dumped as admin on the Friends of the William Stewart Centre page, a few days before the Race for Water was due to end. When challenged, Sarah said that, yes, she had changed settings and if I wanted photos to be put on the page, I could send them to her.

My father realised that he had to take control of this, and very tactfully made some moves to deal with the situation, which would remove Sarah from her position as Development Manager in the Foundation, which title I had given her in 2019, so that she could concentrate on what she very definitely did best – raising money via the feeder charity. As I've said before, her enthusiasm was boundless and most of her ideas were excellent. Dad had written to us all and asked for a reply by 18 January. He had laid his thoughts down for me, on paper.

But, apart from these problems, 2021 was looking bright in many ways.

The difference in the Foundation in two years was heartening.



## CHAPTER 5 – 2021

On 10 January, everything changed, in a big way and a very sad way. Early on that Sunday morning, my phone rang. It was my middle brother, who told me that our father had died. The previous Saturday evening, my father had phoned me, still in great pain. He had fallen asleep and was confused as to what day and time it was. I reassured him that it was only six in the evening. He said: 'I wondered if I was still in this world.' I laughed and said: 'No, it's OK, Dad. I expect you awoke, and it was dark. It's OK, you're not dead.'

Hours later, he was. The neighbours had a system whereby if he hadn't drawn his curtains by 8 a.m. they would call my brother. Seeing the curtains still drawn, they had, and my brother had found my father on the stairs.

At that moment, the world of many fell apart. I phoned my youngest brother in the States and then had the task of phoning LM who was, naturally, distraught. I quickly realised that I would have to let grief take a backseat. The work of my father's Foundation must carry on. And the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. I remember my father, on the morning of my mother's funeral, phoning his students to talk about their assessments; we could both compartmentalise.

Little did I have an inkling of what was to come during the next few months.

So much more money had been raised than the target that there was enough to build shower blocks, so that the community, and the children, would not have to bathe in the dirty river water.

The Centre mourned for my father on that Sunday, as everyone was grieving badly especially, and obviously, the children. But on the Monday, the builders resumed work on the shower blocks. Firstly, they were trying to beat the rains and secondly, it was decided that out of respect for my father, and because he would have wished it, the work must continue. It would be finished in June.





But now, I must return to February of 2021. January had passed in a flurry of activity as is usual following a death; all those on my father's database, to whom he sent his Newsletters, had to be notified, as well as many other friends. There had to be much communication, of course, with my brothers; the Institute for whom Dad worked, and with his students. Eventually, we got through to Dad's funeral service on 4 February which my family and I watched on TV as Covid was still rife and travel difficult. In accordance with my father's wishes, the service was light and cheerful, and ended – as did the funeral services of my mother and sister – with the song 'Happy Wanderer' and everyone waved their adieus to him.

The first hint that the Foundation was deteriorating came in early February when LM emailed me to say that Sarah had pulled the plans for the shower block. He was incensed; the builders were threatening to walk off the job, and had it not been a Friday, they probably would have done. I was incensed, too, that discussions were taking place off piste which could throw the whole of such good work into jeopardy, and wrote a very strong e mail to the UK trustees, although one of my friends said, when they read it, that I was 'too nice'.

LM tried to encourage me:

*'Should we say the King is completely gone? No he hasn't. All our eyes are on you. What I know is that you are the overall boss and you can make decisions any time. What I wish is to see the King's presence though he is resting and you are doing it. The foundation didn't come from nowhere, you and the King raised it up. I remember you even sometimes said you are really tired. You can make decisions on what you got tired of Nasenje. She has really done well in raising money but I feel anything that she is planning should pass through you. I suggest even changing of the plan should have been done through you. You are the one holding the foundation and nothing can be done or implemented without your knowledge. I frankly told her Nasenje must know this all before it is done. I know she is very angry and upset with me but I know I am in safe hands.'*

This was the start of one of the most stressful periods of my life, when I realised, as the sidelining continued, that I was on my own up against trustees who were staging a coup. For example, it was announced that there were two new trustees; I had emails from LM asking who they were. He didn't know; I didn't know.

I became unwell, culminating in a huge panic attack one evening. I'd been charged by LM with taking over the wellbeing of the Foundation – and all those whom it supported – and yet my hands were being tied behind my back and so

were his. But, on my wavelength, came my friend Jane Sanders, an unregistered barrister and dispute resolution adviser, with whom I'd worked on a different matter for the last two years or so. That matter was that, along with so many other unwary folks, my father had lost a great deal of investment money. I'd had a huge learning curve to help Jane run a group helping those investors, many of whom were elderly. She trusted me, and I trusted her. I spent an hour or so on the phone, explaining to her what was happening, and she took up the cudgels. I was no longer on my own.

The announcement which my father had intended to make, on or after 18 January – that Sarah Black would continue as lead trustee with the feeder charity, but her role as Development Manager of the Foundation would be withdrawn – was made by me.

I reviewed all the Foundation's projects, suggesting amendments where some were not working so well, and suggesting the temporary halting of others until agreement could be reached on the way forward. A very informal Memorandum of Understanding was drawn up by me and all documents were sent to the UK trustees. All were rejected out of hand.

Jane, who was already a huge supporter and sponsor – she was sponsoring Anock and the members of his family – drafted a more legalistic Memorandum of Understanding; offered her services free as General Counsel to the Foundation, and tried her level best, with her resolution specialist hat on, to find a way through the ever-increasing angst which was occurring. The MoU, and all her advice, was rejected and spawned the most vicious e mail threads.

In May, in an e mail to everyone, I said: 'What on earth has happened to all of us for this morning to become so vitriolic? What would the orphans think of us?'

Nothing worked. Statements were being made by the UK charity which could have had adverse impact on the Foundation. LM was very troubled, for himself, for the Foundation, for me. *'For example, it is really awkward to see Mary who is right there and one of the founders of the foundation not having any detail of the sponsored kids. Just imagine Mary just seeing pics being posted without her being notified. I have really been wishing to see this phenomenon ending.'* Neither of us could find out how many children were sponsored and who the sponsors were. The rift between the two charities was deepening.

Jane and I set up a three-way social media group with LM. For weeks, we tried to

work out what to do to regain control of the Foundation. As the SCIO took more and more control, it became fraught:

*'What will you do if, for example, the NGO Board has been looking at their website and their social media posts - quite conceivable - and hauls you in to ask what is going on - the literacy programme for example. The concept notes make it quite clear that the programme is the Foundation programme and here the implication is that you are just some sort of messenger boy, delivering parcels to schools on the say so of the SCIO. What are you going to say?'* I asked LM.

*'We should not be controlled because they hold money for the foundation. You need respect and that respect goes to the King as well. You know the time you, the King and myself were establishing the foundation the SCIO wasn't there. Right?'* LM to me.

*'She has a good heart but she doesn't know when to stop and doesn't understand either; it's Mary's legacy handed to her from her Father and she must find a way of putting a stop to it':* said a mutual friend, observing but not part of the furore.

LM was very troubled. *'With the comments from Sarah and Andy, it will need to judge them and think of their angle of thinking. Do you think they are saying they are the trustees of the charity hence independent? Does it mean you and I can't make any suggestions to the operations within the charity? Is it possible to raise funds directly to the foundation and not through the charity? I see from another angle they have it that if they stop fundraising for the foundation the foundation will come to an end. Right?'*

Jane and I tried to reassure LM that we were both working to achieve a rapprochement. But his concerns continued, as the sister charity's demands increased. He said: *'Let's brainstorm, the King's money might come or not. I suggest Jane S help us in coming up with a fundraiser just for an upkeep as we wait for any future fortunes. This is a polite way of keeping the foundation away from Sarah.'*

*'If we have money in future we can make some investments Nasenje. We can buy some land build houses for rentals that will be somehow sustainable. She is trying to control us.'* (6/3/21)

*'We will wait, Levison. Our time will come. The King will still be with us.'* (My reply)

LM: *'Yes I see the King's pics everyday. He hasn't gone for good. As long as you are here with us we are safe...'*

*'She has the money she can dictate Nasenje'* (13/4/21)

*'This is what I am thinking Nasenje. If the charity trustees won't accept it or think otherwise or choose not to raise funds for the foundation then I think we halt all the operations until we have our own finances'* (2/5/21)

Communications were becoming toxic. Following my review of each of the projects, vituperative emails were spawned. One example being *'I don't give a monkeys about lawyers. They talk a lot and achieve very little'*. That was said by one of the UK trustees, Andrew Ewing, who then went on in the email thread to say that he had recommended to LM that he, LM, take a part-time position with a money transfer agent – TNM or Airtel – so that he would generate his own income and not be 'beholden to Mzungus' (a derogatory term for 'white person'.)

Jane and I worked endlessly for weeks to try to ensure that LM regained control, but it was not to be. It became very evident to both of us that LM wouldn't, or couldn't, and Jane and I were, on so many occasions, hung out to dry.

It has been suggested that the reason LM jumped ship was because the money had dried up from my father, and the one holding the purse strings was Sarah Black.

I have had no communication with LM since his last message to me – on 8 July when he said: *'But know the foundation cannot operate without you Nasenje. The SCIO alone can't run the foundation.'*

In June 2020, my father had emailed his children, and LM separately, to say that he had decided to give, in his Will, my late brother's share to LM so that the work of the Foundation could continue, and also so that LM and his family were provided for. As I said earlier, my father had been sending out a regular stipend for LM and funding his daughter's nursery schooling. In one of the e mails to his lawyer, concerned about what would happen to the Foundation in the event of LM's death, Dad had said: *'With reference to Levison, as Co-Founder of the William Stewart Foundation, it is essential that if he dies before me, that his widow will be cared for to continue the work of the Foundation.'* The advice was that LM should make a Will; my father paid for this, and LM's own Will was drawn

up.

Originally, my father had intended the care of the Foundation to be secured by way of a Trust; however, because this would be time-consuming and would cost, he decided simply to change his Will.

This decision did cause some huge angst within the family, in particular to my middle brother, who, with his wife, had been made executor, formerly unbeknownst to them. While Dad was alive, the relationship between my brother and father was never the same again after the Will change, and this caused my brother severe mental anguish, and my father, too. My youngest brother and I took the view that it was Dad's money, to do with as he wished. We all believed that our father was very comfortably off.

However, when accounts came in, we all realised that he was not comfortably off at all; there was some money in the kitty, but not enough to deal with a major emergency. We were all quite taken aback to see that his two grandsons were bequeathed only £1000 each. And even more astounded when my brother was able to get into the Western Union transactions, to realise that £50,000 had gone out to Malawi since 2017. Some monies were given to my father to send out, and I worked through the bank accounts and estimated that those donations were a maximum of £5,000.

My middle brother, the executor, was adamant. LM would not receive anything more than a nominal sum. My youngest brother and I eventually persuaded him to agree to an initial figure of £20,000, given that £50k had already gone from my father's account. Lawyers suggested that we arrange a Deed of Variation.

In retrospect, although my father had changed his Will in good faith, it was an unfair Will as highlighted in a comment from one of my brothers. *'Let's be generous and say living costs in Malawi are 1/15 of our living costs. It follows that (as the Will currently stands), it gives FIFTEEN times more to someone in Malawi, than it does to us. Am I the only one who believes that is horribly unfair?'*

Had any of us known how much had already gone to Malawi and how little Dad had left, we would all probably have spoken with him while he was alive. But he was a private man, and someone whom I've described as 'the quiet dictator' – in the best sense of the expression – and so none of us did.

Against legal advice, because I did not want LM to receive, out of the blue, a

lawyer's letter, I said that I would write to him explaining the situation. I wrote to him on 1 July, explaining that the money already given by my father was now disadvantaging my family, who had been in talks with local lawyers.

That was a huge mistake, because he took it to the Malawian trustees, and then clearly to the UK charity trustees, and I had unwittingly put myself in the frame for an inordinate amount of stress which was to follow.

On 21 July, I received an e mail from LM, retiring me from the Foundation, and this announcement was made public. I went into print on social media and received amazing support from my friends, many of whom were supporters, donors and sponsors of the Foundation.

I was simply not prepared to have an untruth stated. The situation was aired very publicly. That stress was on the one hand; on the other were the increasingly vitriolic e mails and on the 'third' hand were painful communications between the members of my family.

My father and I had said, from the beginning, that the aim was to make the Foundation as self-sufficient as it possibly could be – that he and I would be a helping hand – and that over time the Foundation's personnel should be Malawi-based where possible.

The impact on donors and sponsors, especially those who had been there from the beginning, who loved the Foundation and its work; those folk who had sent their own precious items for the children, was tremendous. At the beginning they took notice of my posts imploring them not to hurt the children, whose fault this most definitely was not. But that proved to be impossible as the heat ramped up.

*At one point, I said: 'I am certainly seeing who my friends are, and I am very grateful for those true friends - the ones who know me and who know that I'm straight up, as my father was. Not the few people who are messaging me one thing and doing another - more running with the hare and the hounds. Not those who have jumped, screeching, on to a bandwagon with no knowledge of the e mails, messages and screenshots that I have. I can sense that Dad is aware of what's going on and, more importantly, the God which some purport to worship, knows too.'*

As time went on, and the emails and social media posts became more vicious and more absurd, some sponsors withdrew because they felt that they had no

choice. I was one of them and gave up the sponsorship of a little lad. Other people kept their sponsorship on for a while. One person was denied their sponsorship – Jane, who had sponsored Anock and his whole family. One friend queried because she had not seen evidence of her sponsorship; she was banned and blocked, too and gave up her sponsorship. Social media posts spoke of 'Team Mary'; original sponsors who questioned, and asked LM for proof that I had resigned or intended to retire were treated appallingly and blocked from the facebook pages. No proof was ever provided. These are some examples of what was said, publicly, by the UK trustees:

*'How many kids lives have been harmed by Mary and her proxy's relentless smear campaign so far? It appears to me that Mary is hell bent on destroying her fathers legacy.'*

*'If you attack the Foundation or the SCIO you are literally taking food from kids mouths. What type of person does that just to get revenge when they were the person causing all the trouble in the first place? The lack of self awareness is incredible.'*

I took down all the information on the website and put up an explanatory piece, including my father's 'Thoughts on the Way Forward'. Those documents remain.

At the end of July, I received an e mail from another of the UK charity's trustees:

Dear Mary

You continue to suggest on Facebook among other things that you have not resigned despite the fact that you have done it on more than one occasion and on numerous occasions told Levison never to contact you again.

I refer to to(sic) the attached screenshot of the message you sent to Levison on in (sic) May where you confirmed that you were removing yourself and Jane from the foundation altogether.

'This is the only way forward Levison' was what you said.

You couldn't have been much clearer about your intentions.

We are happy to post the screenshot of your resignation message but have been reluctant to do so as it goes down a road that we, unlike you, have been prepared



to travel.

If you do have the foundation's best interests at heart, then you would not be taking this path. That is exactly why we have not engaged with the comments on social media, which are full of inaccuracies and exaggerations, tailored to fit your agenda.

Let us know how you want to proceed.

We will, if need be, publicly correct your version of events.

We expect a public acknowledgement that you did in fact resign and the removal of the misinformation and innuendo that has been posted on the foundation page.

Yours sincerely and on behalf of  
Levison Malambya (Co Founder of the William Stewart Foundation) and the  
Trustees of the Friends of the William Stewart Centre.

My response:

Dear \*\*\*\*

I am aghast at the tone and content of your e mail.

You will remember that I messaged you on 14 April when I suspected that you were one of the new trustees and said, inter alia - 'I was very glad when I fathomed out that you might be a trustee and asked you. Because you will bring the commercial appreciation and experience to the SCIO'.

I thought that these attributes would naturally go hand-in-hand with your work position. I'm sure that they must do, and therefore I can only conclude that you have been fed untruths.

To answer you.

Yes, on two or three occasions in the months since my father died, I have been so frustrated that I have said I would leave. The screenshot you attached is part of one occasion, on 16 May, which resulted in Levison saying that he would resign and the Malawian trustees saying that they would follow. If I went, they all would. Whether by intention or naivety, the Foundation trustees had made a speedy

resolution almost impossible. However, Jane used her mediation skills to resolve that immediate rift.

I have actually pre-empted your threat to post the screenshot you attached. This is a comment on my timeline. I am happy to also put it on the Foundation page if you think that it will provide clarity.

*'During the last months where I have done my nut about the way in which the Foundation has been heading, there have been two occasions when I have threatened to go. On one occasion Levison himself said that if I go, he goes and the Malawian trustees followed suit. Jane persuaded me to cool down, confident that things would be able to be resolved.*

*In fact the very last message from Levison to me reads: 'But know the foundation cannot operate without you Nasenje. The SCIO alone can't run the foundation. '*

*That's what's such a puzzle; it's almost as if the Foundation itself, or at least its social media, has been taken over too.*

*I have, in fact, tagged Levison on the original Foundation post asking him if he will provide answers to people, including me.'*

With regard to the second allegation in your first paragraph, I have never, ever said to Levison that he is never to contact me again. Why have you not asked to see evidence of that?

On or around 16 May, my husband, furious at the disrespect being shown, did message Levison; you will see, on the attached document, what I said to Levison on that subject.

Your comment 'full of inaccuracies and exaggerations, tailored to fit your agenda'. I am far too experienced, \*\*\*\*, to state anything which cannot be backed up with hard evidence, therefore your comment is not only untrue, it is insulting and wholly disrespectful. The attached contains a very few of the conversations between Levison and me since 16 May; there are many more in which we discussed a wide range of matters pertaining to the Foundation.

Let me know how you want to proceed. Rest assured, however, that I will continue to publicly correct any version of events which is inaccurate.

I should mention here that my own family and my siblings and their spouses are consumed with anger at the disrespect shown to Jane and me and ultimately to the man who is called 'The Father and Founder'; their ire will doubtless be further fuelled when they are made aware of these latest e mails.

Yours sincerely,

Round about the same time, my sister-in-law, the joint executor of my father's Will, received a letter from Paul Holst, UK Charity Trustee, speaking on behalf of LM, involving himself in family business and enquiring as to probate.

I and my husband found ourselves blocked from both the Foundation facebook page and that of the UK charity.

In August, I learned that I had been banned from the Bananabox Trust warehouse and so was, and still am, unable to send anything on the container. The explanation, when I challenged, was spurious. So much for the 'long and fruitful liaison'.

The executors then informed the family that serious discrepancies had been found between the Western Union records in their possession and the one set of Foundation accounts which they had found in my father's possession.

The executors did not answer Paul Holst. When probate was granted, they e mailed LM to tell him that it had been granted.

In October, Paul Holst emailed my sister-in-law to complain about his name being mentioned by me on the website which, despite the UK charity trying to get control of it, had remained with me. The executors had zero to do with the Foundation or its sister charity.

Andrew Ewing, on my 'resignation/retirement':

*'You worked with the guy for 4 years. He owes so much to your Dad. He is torn in two pieces because of his love for your Dad and also how damn hard you make it to work with you. Always bossing him about. Nitpicking on small items, micro managing him. Controlling him.'*

He was referring to LM, who asked me, just before the retirement email, what colour I thought the shower blocks should be painted!

In mid-December, I received a letter from Paul Holst's lawyers, threatening legal action for defamation. This was ably responded to with supporting statements from me and four other people, and no further action was taken. I referred in that letter to statements made by Sarah Black to a young Malawian whom I was mentoring, and, separately to a Malawian Reverend, whom she greatly upset by making disparaging references to his friendship with me not being in accordance with him being a man of the cloth. I told Holst's lawyers that I had been advised to take legal action.

Meanwhile, the executors were still attempting to obtain proper financial records from LM, in order to carry out their fiduciary duties to the Estate and, in the family's view, moral duties to donors and sponsors of the Foundation. They wrote to LM eight times, from September 2021 through to end of 2022, asking for the records, to no avail. There were flat refusals; stating that accounts were audited; that he had been advised not to send them; saying that he would send the accounts if the executors sent details of the £50k, or simply ignoring the requests; the emails were punctuated by LM asking where was his money.

The subject of my father's Will raged within the family, engendering literally hundreds of emails; draft after draft after draft of emails to LM.

The executors were adamant that no monies would be paid until the accounts had been provided to them.

## CHAPTER 6 – 2022 AND BEYOND

In May 2022, I received an email with an attached letter from a Malawian Human Rights Lawyer, stating that she had been told that my brother and I were executors; that we were refusing to pay LM and that LM had demanded to see proof of the £50k gone from my father's bank account to Malawi.

I wrote back to her stating, in part, that LM knew perfectly well who the executors were, and ended with the advice that she go back to her client and obtain proper facts.

In September 2022, LM said that he would accept £60k to wind up the Estate; however, emails continued to and fro, but in August 2023, the executors decided to pay him the full amount, via their lawyers. The other beneficiaries ended up paying extra so that LM's identity and bank account could be verified.

I had said on the Foundation website that the executors did not ask for what proved to be an extremely stressful and onerous task. I am presuming that the stress proved, in the final analysis, too much for them, which is why they made the settlement without continuing to pursue the account discrepancies.

In December 2024, the lawyers forwarded LM's share – £103,000+ to him which made him a kwacha millionaire.

This is what my father said, in his original e mail to LM, after he had changed his Will:

*'I know that you will carry on the work of the William Stewart Foundation after I've gone. Over the past three years you have proved to be reliable and a man of high integrity and I know that the Foundation will be in safe hands. The quarter share is not only to develop the work of the Foundation, it is to ensure that you and your family are provided for.'*

The sister charity had changed its name, in 2021 to Changing Lives Malawi, along with its remit.

It incenses me, and various people in the UK and Malawi, that untruths are stated in many of its posts. For example, a fundraiser entitled ' Help us with a Christmas Party for 500 orphans', one of many times that incorrect number of orphans was stated. The distance from the Resource Centre to the school was greatly

exaggerated - less than 6km became 20km, presumably to validate their spend on building a sponsor-funded school.

It angers me that those who were waiting patiently to be included in the spread of the oak tree's branches were, and remain, marginalised and left to their own devices, all the resources being poured into one small area of Malawi.

It puzzles me, too, why I am seeing Changing Lives Malawi continuing to beg for money for the Foundation when the existing Founder received so much money from my father's Estate.

Do I regret anything? Yes, I certainly regret not pressing my father more on how much he had already donated, and how much he had left. Just before his last Christmas, I had the merest inkling that not all was well with his finances. I asked him, and he assured me that everything was fine.

I regret, too, the decision not to be part of the sister charity. I took the stance for good reason at the time; so that I could not be accused, down the line, of having a conflict of interest.

I'm saddened by those former friends who have leaped on to a bandwagon, with little or no knowledge, but more than any impact on me personally, I deeply regret the impact on the sponsors and donors – my friends – who, in support of me were painted as something they most certainly are not. I am angry, too, that the whole debacle has disadvantaged Malawians. Cynicism, which I worked so hard to dispel, has crept back in and tainted Malawians who remained faithful to me. But I will continue to try to help those people as best I can – and keep faith with my father's original vision.

I certainly regret the chasm which opened between the eldest of my three brothers and me, and I regret the distance which now exists between my middle brother, his wife, and me, although I may, over time, be able to achieve harmony.

The oak tree, which grew so tall and so strong in the first four years, died with my father, but was not the only casualty of this disturbing African affair.

There is so much more that I haven't mentioned in this account of the Foundation's first years – the appeals people did for us – Patapata Pam raising money and shoes through her business; the nursery children; the link with Mzuzu Golden Coffee; the putting of people in touch with one another in Malawi and the

friendships which persist to this day; when Hazel saw her precious teddies – which could have so easily gone overboard in a container disaster on the Indian Ocean, but survived – making children happy.

I will end with the words of Stephen Grellet, the Quaker missionary, which my father quoted so often:

**‘I shall pass through this world but once. Any good therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again’.**

My father followed this advice but, had he been able to see what would happen so soon after his death, I believe that he would have done things very differently. So would I.

This is the last photo of the King, taken when Tom, Paul and Toby came to see him on Boxing Day, 2020. Dad always said he would leave and move on to Stewartville, as he described it, only when his work here was done. For him, it was.

