

Interviewee: Jonathan Smith

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So I was, I was effectively dragged into it really in some ways because my mum was involved, obviously, in kind of original committee things. And she was probably quite friendly with Jenni Barr who was kind of arranging the whole thing. Then at some point it was kind of floated as an idea that, you know, the first trip would go out, and it'd be good to have a kid along. Yeah, by default I was the most suitable kid. I was 11 when we went out the first time, so wasn't that involved in a lot of the planning of it, because I was quite young. I think it was a good idea almost to have me along really as a kind of icebreaker. People feel more comfortable opening up and having more of a partnership conversation I think if there's a kid along. So I was kind of shoved into playing with the kids, and then the parents will talk to people better because there was a lot of them.

I think there was concern at the very beginning of the partnership that we wanted to make a partnership rather than a kind of charitable thing where young people from Scotland were coming over and looking down their noses. We didn't want that to be the thing. We wanted it to be more balanced. Yeah, I missed my last two weeks of primary school when we went to the trip. Yeah. So I got to out of my last two weeks of Primary Seven to go. And had an absolutely great time. Yeah, I've been to Germany loads of times. And I think I'd maybe been to France once. But apart from that it was my first trip far abroad, you know, away from family and people who knew me and all that. I got my first actual passport to go, previously I had travelled on my mum's passport around Europe.

It was a woman called Margaret, who was in charge of where we were staying, she was running the Likhubula House. And she kind of picked us up from the airport and drove us out into the village. Anyway, I kind of got out the car outside the church, and there were dozens of people waiting for us, you know, singing and clapping and welcoming us to the community, it was really, I'd never experienced anything like that before, it was completely different.

And obviously the poverty is a big shock to someone who's grown up in this part of the world, it was very different. It was a big kind of adjustment of this is how people are living and this is how we're going to live while we're here. And these are the things that actually kind of matter almost. But at the same time, it was so welcoming. Everyone was really friendly, the weather was gorgeous. Yeah, I was very happy to be there. And it was a very enjoyable trip.

There was a point actually in the first trip when I would have been 11. And I think it had been mentioned at some point that I'd done reasonably well on a math test at my own school. So the teacher there was like, right up to the front of the class, you teach a math lesson. It was quite daunting this expectation that I would be able to do that kind of thing. It was probably one of the scariest bits of the trip, to be honest, because it was very large class sizes, you know, just maybe 80 or 100 kids, and they were, you know, raptly paying attention to me. It wasn't like my own class where no one would be paying any attention to the teacher. Everyone wanted to learn. Thankfully, I had you know, the, the actual teacher had given me what he was going to teach to the class that day. So I had a lesson plan but still. Yeah, it was quite an experience. It certainly helped me in just having to speak to people and I'm quite happy to stand up at work and give a presentation or something like that after these kinds of experiences. It just feels easy in comparison.

The second time actually it was funny when we arrived. Because obviously we had the kind of warm welcoming things and there was like rustlings and whisperings in the crowd, Jonathan, Jonathan, he was here before, it was almost like being a celebrity welcomed back. It was me but I'm not that special.

We had a kind of youth club called the Likhubula Link where we kind of go along once a week, and we'd all be involved and we'd be would either be planning the next trip, or dealing with the photographs from previous trips, or just keeping in touch as well. We had email contact and things. So I was quite involved for a few years, it was definitely something that I think shaped how I see the world in a lot of ways just having that perspective and experience. Certainly, I had a bit of a bit of a hard time kind of reintegrating after the first trip coming back to Scotland. And then, you know, none of the kids I'd been at school with had any of that experience. And I felt quite, almost guilty about how wealthy we are in this country coming back, you know, going to the supermarket and there's just shelves and shelves and shelves of stuff.

There was a bit of an adjustment period more returning than going I found particularly because I didn't really have any peers who I could talk to about it who understood because nobody else had done anything like it.

It was a lot easier the second time because there were kind of five of us kids who went so we had each other to talk to about it later. Yeah, it was. I wouldn't say it was like a bad time in my life, particularly, but it was an adjustment coming back and a bit of a culture shock, like, Yeah, okay, we are super wasteful in this country, going to high school and having friends who'd like chuck their five pennies in the bin because they weren't worth enough. It was also, it was a really kind of a very packed schedule while we were there. There wasn't a huge amount of downtime, we had some downtime, we were in Blantyre for a day or two at the start of the trip and then we were going from place to place to place while we were there, visiting the school, visiting the hospital. We didn't visit the hospital my first trip. It was quite a packed agenda so there wasn't much time to decompress while we were there.

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We had to sit through the church service every Sunday while we were there, it was you know four or five hours of church on a Sunday morning. And I felt like I was the only child in the room who wasn't allowed to leave because we were kind of sat up on the stage at the front being shown off to the community. But I noticed all the other kids in the church were running in and out, or like a lorry turned up outside at some point to like service the local shop or whatever, and all the kids ran outside and jumped on the back of the lorry and got a ride around the village and I was like, aw, I wish I could have done that. It would have been much more fun than being sat on the stage. So that was that was one of the first things that kind of stood out.

Another one would be the primary school, the whole primary school, I think, just as a place, is very kind of firm in my memory. It was kind of the combination of the complete lack of resources with the level of enthusiasm, because, you know, there were maybe 1000 Kids and eight teachers or something like that. It was really under understaffed, but the teachers were all so keen, you know, they really wanted the kids to learn but they were kind of held back by what was available. Likewise, the kids were a lot more attentive and I'm comparing this to my own kind of school experience. You know, we'd be mucking about not listening to the teacher whereas they had two or three times as many kids in the class and everyone was paying attention. So that was definitely a standout kind of memory.

I met a boy called Kingsley that I met on the first trip. I actually spent a few hours kind of just me and him running around and I had the so I had the good digital camera on the first trip because Jenni, she had an old film camera that she really liked. So she let me have the digital camera for the trip. So I remember sitting at the river with Kingsley taking pictures of things together and he took pictures of me and I took pictures of him and we just kind of had a chat and stuff. That was nice because I met back up with him on the second trip and he actually climbed the mountain with us and things, so it was good to actually have like an individual contact almost over there. I really lost touch after the trips because I didn't have any way to keep in contact with him.