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JANA DULAR

The warm heart of Africa

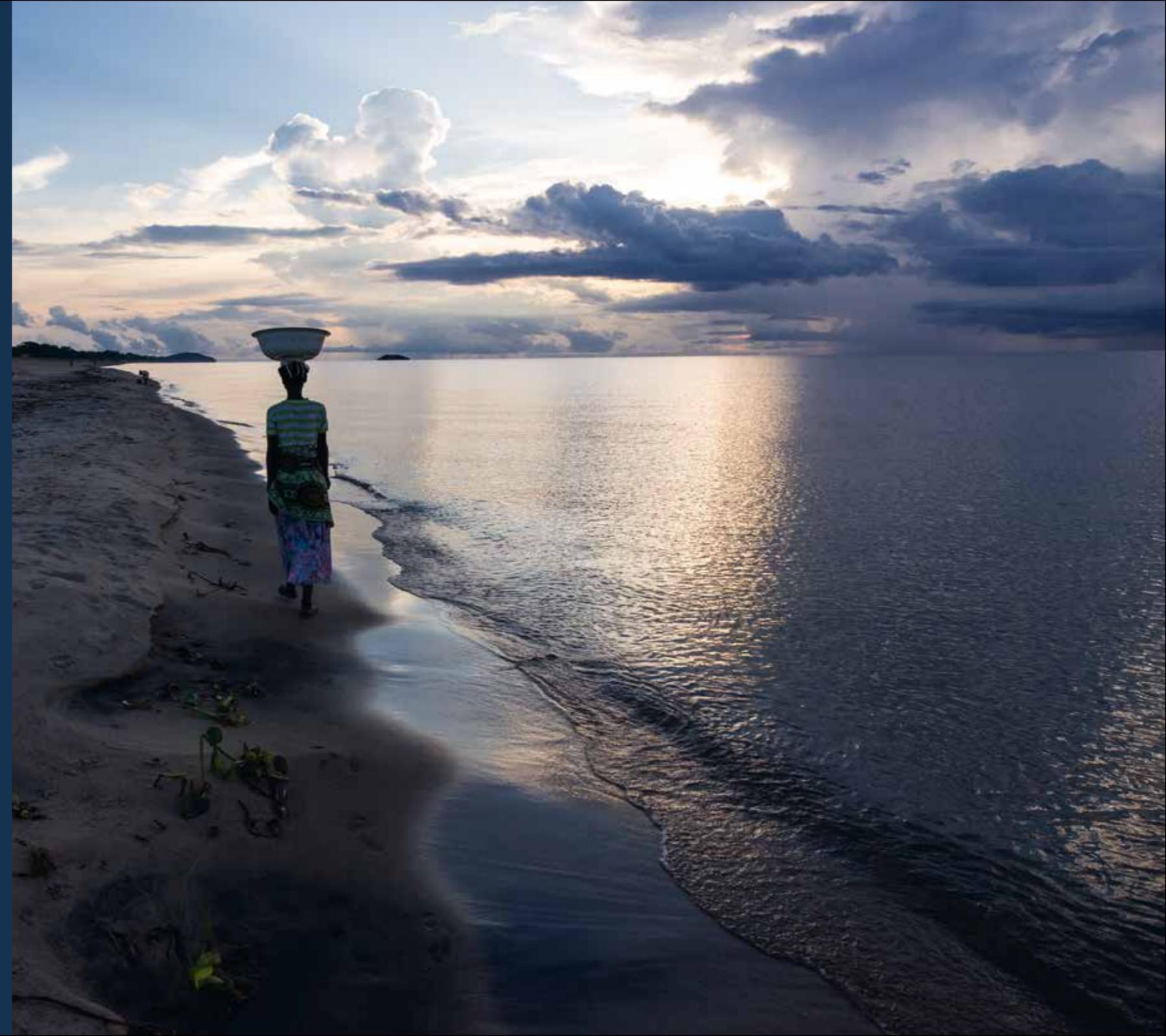


JANA DULAR, BOGDAN KLADNIK, GUTHEMA ROBA

How to begin a story that changed my life
so magnificently, so magically and in such
fantastic ways that it is hard to explain?

Should I start by saying I dreamt of Africa
since I had been a kid?

Or should I tell you I was born in Slovenia,
a small European country of 2 million people,
but always felt I have an African heart and soul?





Because since I was 4-years old,
I was telling my parents these exact words:

*"Mum, dad, I am serious, listen to me.
When I grow up, I am going to live in Africa,
I will help kids there. I promise."*



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text
Jana Dular

photography
Bogdan Kladnik

poems
Guthema Roba

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Contents

Before the beginning	13
Growing up	16
First steps on Mother Africa	22
Typical rides	28
Hygiene, traditional outfits and hairdos	35
Ugandan schools and my volunteering	41
Ugandan traditions	49
Batwa/Pygmy society by Lake Bunyonyi	51
A story of a 120 year old man	57
Ugandan children with special needs	66
Giving orphans better future (Tanzania)	73
Building school for Maasai children	78
Maasai traditions	83
The Warm heart of Africa (Malawi)	91
SEKA school and 2-year breakfasts	94
Cerebral Malaria and my Miracle	95
Mazembe village	97
Building ELA's educational centre	101
ELA's programs for children	111
My Blessed Love (Kenya)	122
About almost everything	128

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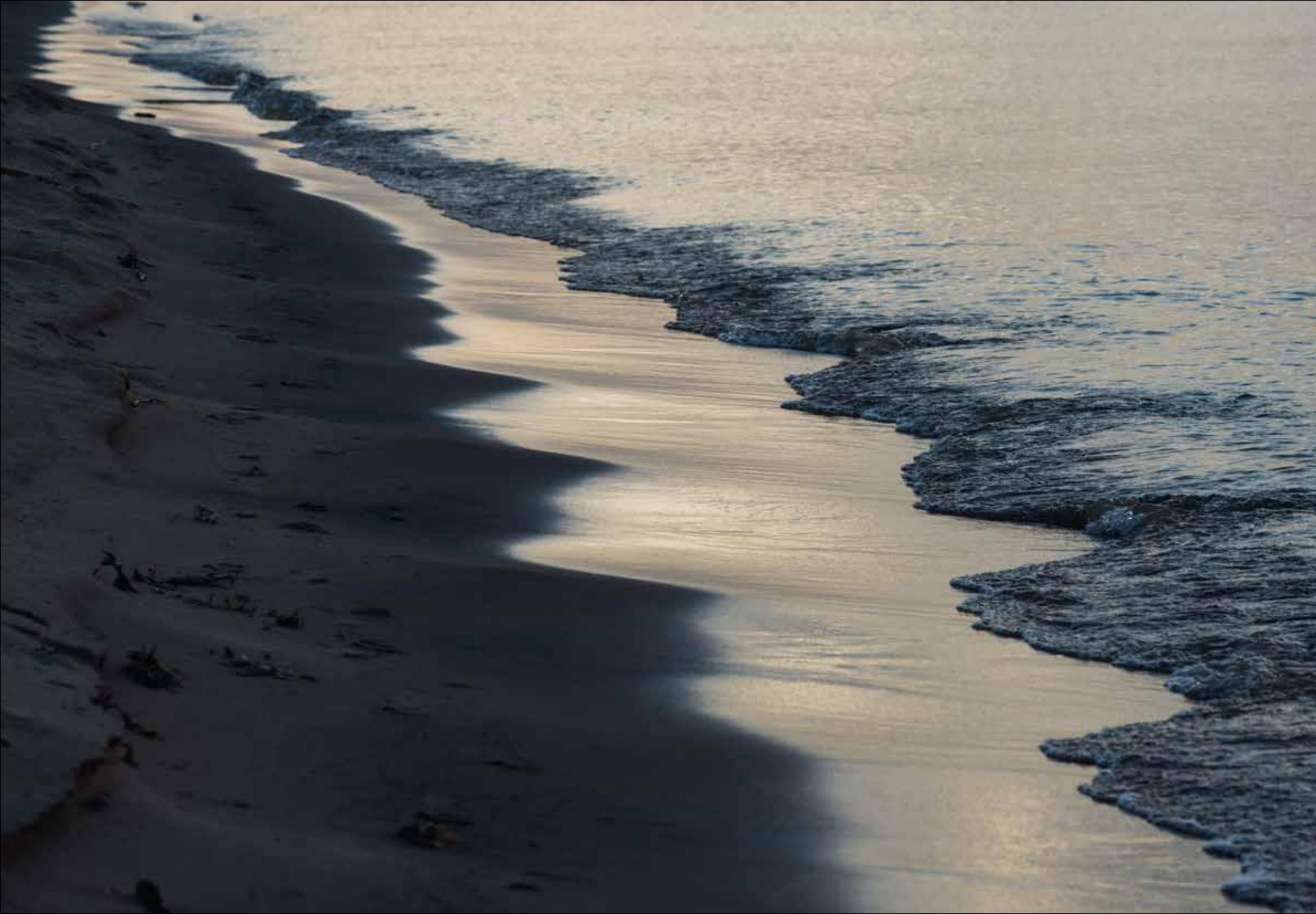
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Ripples

*Like
pebbles
we throw
in the ocean,
words we utter
or whisper
can make ripples
and waves.*

Guthema Roba



Before the beginning

How to begin a story that changed my life so magnificently, so magically and in such fantastic ways that it is hard to explain? Should I start by saying I dreamt of Africa since I had been a kid? Or should I tell you I was born in Slovenia, a small European country of 2 million people, but always felt I have an African heart and soul?

Because since I was 4-years old, I was telling my parents these exact words: "Mum, dad, I am serious, listen to me. When I grow up, I am going to live in Africa, I will help kids there. I promise." And now you must be asking yourself, did she go and fulfilled her dreams, what happened, where did she go and does this story have a good ending? I will tell you all, I promise. And yes, I did go, I followed my dreams. I decided I will be that person who will be joyful and excited upon each day that arrives, the one who will shine out her inner beauty and be grateful for everything she is blessed with. So I left the coziness of Europe and found a world I never heard of, a world no one ever told me about - I mean not like it is in reality. All I have ever heard of Africa through media, books and magazines was that Africa (despite being a continent of 54 colorful countries) is dry, poor and non-diverse. Everyone has been saying one story and one story only - that the whole of Africa is a place of hunger, wars and despair. But I found something completely different; I found immense kindness in the people I met everywhere

I went. I found such divine innate peace within people, joy that oozes from majority of them. I found Africans being immensely acceptable of different cultures, races and different ways of living. I found heartfelt assistance from people, I found laughter so loud I had never heard before and I found a sense of Oneness and Love I had always dreamt of experiencing. Yes, I found problems too: their grand issues with expensive schooling, health care, low wages and in some countries, wars and hunger. But such issues are not true for all of Africa, and not even in countries where droughts or wars do rage on. These dark images are not valid in every particle of the country, but only in certain areas. I would like to tell you stories of that Africa, of another side of life no one ever reports: of the courage and wisdom I see in people, stories of appreciation and celebration of their lives, the joyful attitude they show in every moment, their immense respect towards elders, old customs that are still part of their lives, etc. I have been truly impressed with the African attitude, of how people deal with their problems and how they do not allow them to overpower their lives. I found commendable strength in them, deepest faith, spiritual connections to their Source and sense of Oneness, Respect and Love amongst each other.



This is why I always claim that in Africa I have learned the most valuable lessons of my life. I learned about right values such as respect, how to live life in deeper ways, how to appreciate all I am blessed with; I learnt to bless my meals, to bless my journeys, to admit when I am wrong, then ask for forgiveness and for assistance thereafter.

Through living in Africa I allowed myself to be “who-I-really-am” and to follow my dreams no matter how hard they have been to achieve. I realized I can truly be the “real-me” and am totally accepted as such.

I fell in love with an undiscovered world of the warmest and kindest people, an amazing colorful culture and breathtakingly beautiful nature.

But know that I have lived in only four countries so far and yet I have found all of these diversities. What if we would add all other African countries to them? We would certainly find that Africa is a continent of diversities in all shapes of life.

Growing up and starting to recognize the African heart in me

As I told you, I had dreamt of going to Africa since I was a little kid. My first contact with an African heart was when I was 4-years old and I met my family's friend Mr. Robert Yebuah, born in Ghana. Around forty years ago, he married our dear family friend, Vida Zupančič, and with their twin daughters they had lived in the town I grew up in (Novo mesto). I have deep respect and love for them, and Robert always inspired me to go anywhere my heart leads me to, just as his heart guided him to Slovenia. I truly admire this wonderful couple. I have always felt loved by them, impressed by their stories and in awe of the commendable strength it took to be an interracial couple in those "old times". They struggled because of being different and I was deeply inspired by the choices they made in order to live as they felt right for them and their family. I also told my parents at that early age, that one day I would marry an African just like Robert. Throughout my youth, I listened keenly to all their stories and was inspired by their strength. They lived life on their own terms and had only answer to their own values when it came to love.

I remember when I came for a visit to their apartment in Novo mesto, how excited I was to play with all sorts of items Robert brought from Ghana: beautiful ornaments, amazing unique and colorful jewelry, wooden masks, those beautiful blankets

and fabrics of brightest colors and patterns. What a warm feeling came over me when I stared at Robert's photos: him on those bright red dirt roads surrounded with his brothers and sisters; photos of their twin daughters playing on sandy beaches in Ghana; feeling that serenity and joy Africa brought to their lives. How I adored learning from Robert how to play a traditional game, omweso/bao, which he had played as a kid. I always knew that whenever my family would visit his, he would cook something delicious and funny for my taste at that time. I even recall a moment, when his dear sister sent a few mangoes from Ghana in a package and we ate the last one together. Oh, how sweet it was. It tasted more delicious than anything else I had ever tried before. I remember when Robert and Vida gave me a small knitted wallet they had brought from home for my Birthday. I can't describe my appreciation, finally owning something from Africa. Through Robert, I first got in touch with a different culture than mine - a different color of skin, an exotic language, a new sense of rhythm with beautiful singing - and most certainly the deep calm presence of someone from a Land-so-far-away. I can say that it is through knowing this inspirational couple that my "long fermenting" African life story first began. I have been deeply blessed to have grown up in the loving and supportive family that has always embraced me. My father Marjan and mother Ida began raising my elder sister Katja and me in a

small village called Jurka vas, about 8km from the southeastern town of Novo mesto in Slovenia. Slovenia is a small country of not even 2 million people, located in southeastern Europe. Before Slovenia got its independence in 1991, we were part of the union called Yugoslavia. I remember little of those "old" times as I was too young to have a real perspective on what was happening. We became an independent country late, for a majority of African countries became independent of their colonial grip around 1960. Slovenians went through only 10 days of war with the Yugoslavian army causing only minor economic setbacks and very few victims. We were so called, "the luckiest of all ex Yugoslavian countries". Slovenians were able to keep all the benefits that remained from a socialistic and communist system beforehand - free education, free health system, social welfare, etc. As I grew up with all of those commodities; having them just seemed normal and I did not think of I had lived a privileged life. But later on when I started living in Africa and seeing all the challenges and extents to which Africans go in order to provide their children with good education and health care, I realized how immensely blessed I had been each and every day of my life. Despite all the advantages of European life, I was a pretty normal kid. I loved animals and spent my excess energy in nature, as I was a pretty hyperactive child. We helped on grandmother's farm, picked potatoes, maize, apples, and had a vegetable field where all our food grew. We also enjoyed our

vineyard where my parents built a weekend house to enjoy those joyful family gatherings. If you ask my father and mother they would tell you I was a really positive, joyful child, but also very determined to do what she felt was best for her, every time. It seems that that spirit has guided me in all the major decisions I have made in my life, especially concerning Africa. Within myself, I have always known exactly, undoubtedly, what I needed to do in order to be fulfilled. When I was going through those teenage years I had to be "cool", as we called it then. Many of my peers started smoking and drinking excessively; some even took drugs. I chose another path and started playing saxophone, as I felt that would also make me cool. Before the sax I had played accordion, but I felt like I needed to play a new instrument. Playing saxophone, being part of a quartet band and a wind orchestra nicely filled most of my free time in high school and kept me "straight" through my teenage years. I was an A-student throughout high school but somehow never did truly fit in with "the crowd". One thing about my schoolmates always bothered me. When I listened to other people, either in school or on the streets, they were always so negative and utterly pessimistic. People seemed unfulfilled and unhappy, always complaining. They wanted something more, and sought fulfillment in a new appliance, a new electronic device, or a trip of some sort on Friday nights. But they did not the take time to search for fulfillment in their souls - they did not

make an effort to find inner peace, inner satisfaction and joy in every day. They were unaware how lucky they were and that they were extremely blessed. When I was trying to find positive minded people who would inspire me into being the person I wanted to be, it was not easy. That really made me sad and left me with a feeling that I really don't belong in this "modern, materialistic society". After high school, the time came to choose my future career. If I listened to my inner guidance I would for sure have studied to be a kindergarten teacher or a primary school teacher as I have always adored children. Somehow I allowed outside influences to guide me and I chose law. In 2005 I started studying law in Slovenia's capital city Ljubljana and by my 3rd year I was questioning my direction. "What will I do with my career?" I felt close to only two subjects in the law - family law and international law, so I was starting to explore options that involved assisting children through international adoptions. I decided to not just read laws about it, but make a move and step on African soil to investigate how orphans really live in Africa. I'd see for myself if international adoptions are a truly sensible way of helping children towards a better future. Within every cell of my body I felt I was ready for the trip of my life and to be embraced by mother Africa. For nearly one year I prepared, looking for options of volunteering in orphanages and collecting clothes for children through kindergartens in Novo mesto. I managed to collect around 200kg of beautiful,

colorful clothes and sent four big packages to one orphanage in Tanzania. Packages were leaving so I decided I must too. I planned it all, read through numerous blogs, read many magazines about where to travel in Africa, what to do and what to bring with me in my backpack. I got eight different injections to prevent diseases; I packed half of backpack with medicine for "just in case", and booked my ticket. My rough plan was to first travel through Uganda, then go to Tanzania to an orphanage and lastly to relax for few days on Zanzibar Island. I expected to return back to Slovenia in 2.5 months. These were my plans, but "The Universe" had its own ideas. It slapped me with a few ultimate surprises, and taught me life lessons that gave me fresh new perspectives on who "I-Really-am" and what I can contribute to the world. I realized that I would never be the same, think the same, or act the same as I had before my African re-birth - and I honestly liked it. I could feel layers of facade peeling off and allowing my true identity to shine through, to inspire and live positively. Being in Africa, and "out of my comfort zone", brought me into situations I had never known. I faced challenges that life in Europe would have never presented, and was pushed into a deep, revealing, joyful, discovery of my true self. I saw clearly for the first time what my ultimate purpose was, the role I had always felt within - to assist African children towards better education. That special realization turned my world around in ways I had never expected. My two and a half month trip became a full year of transformation, and then ...





Mystical journey

*Three things you need
for your mystical journey -
the heart that is open and fearless -
your ability to stay still
in the face of great commotion
and your willingness
to let go of your belief
and die into light.*

Guthema Roba

First steps on Mother Africa (Uganda)

On October 24th 2008 I was standing in front of the biggest plane I had ever seen. I could barely contain my excitement and not tell everyone around me where I was going, what I would be doing there, and how immensely important this trip was for me. I would finally be going where my heart had been guiding me my whole life. I had my ticket and passport in one hand, and in the other, my small Swahili dictionary. And my mind swirled with exotic phrases like "Jambo" (Hello), Jina lako nani? (What is your name?), Jina langu ni Jana (My name is Jana), Ninatoka Ulaya (I am coming from Europe), and Choo wapi? (Where is toilet?). I finally stepped onto the plane that would deliver me to my final destination, Kampala, Uganda, in the heart of East Africa. On the flight, I imagined what I would see when I first stepped on African soil. Being subjected to all the media up to then, my mind automatically started projecting images of poverty, no electricity, hungry people reaching with their hands toward me asking me for food, crying babies with inflated bellies, mud houses, and poor roads even in this capital city. I thought that immediately I would see giraffes, zebras, buffalos near the airport and savannah all around. But as the plane was nearing the ground all I could see was serenity - rolling green hills, banana trees and a grand city just below me. When the plane's wheels hit the runway, tears started running

down my cheeks. As I walked down the stairs, I was so immensely joyful, thankful, excited and emotional to finally feel Africa beneath my feet. I remember taking in the biggest breath to check to see if African air tasted the same as European air. I looked up and saw the bluest sky without any clouds and I felt my heart skipping with joy. I felt as if I had returned - as if I was home. I rushed through the immigration check point, paid 50 dollars for my visa, and just like that was welcomed by the kind smile of an immigration officer inviting me into his country. I grabbed my bags from the conveyor belt and rushed outside to find a taxi driver waiting for me with a sign, "Jana Dular, welcome to Uganda". It must have been my adventurous spirit that attracted such an interesting driver and car. I could see many posh taxis waiting for customers but we settled into in the most beaten up Toyota in the line. It was rusty, loud and smoking badly from the exhaust pipe. It all added to the feeling of adventure at the beginning of this, my first journey on Ugandan roads. We drove on dark asphalt roadways, some in good condition (usually freshly built by the Chinese) and some with deep scary potholes which made the ride really wild. I was instantly surprised at how developed the city of Kampala was. Four million people reside and work there, and I had never seen bigger supermarkets, banks, Universities, restaurants, and cafes. Of course there is electricity, a sewage system, running water, roads that are reasonably clean, and like in all cities, traffic jams. The entire city is buzzing with people

walking, and with stores, businesses, vegetable stalls and meat markets. It was just as any other grand city I had ever seen - a busy place with busy people trying to earn their daily bread. From time to time I saw a beggar on the street, but the majority of people minded their own business, rushing to their work or from it, living big city life. With eagerness and excitement I was observing people, trying to feel their energy and trying to take in all I could with every single breath. I must admit that at first I felt a bit uneasy and nervous being the center of attention, as I had never been used to that in Europe. Wherever I went, people turned when I walked by, made comments about me and commented color of my skin. They used the term "mzungu", meaning a white person, but somehow I always felt they said it with positive tone, with smiles on their faces. Some tried to get my attention by shouting, "mzungu", while some whistled and smiled. Some whom I passed by on the streets would call out, "I love you, marry me!", which of course made me laugh. I wondered if their deep desire was to go to Europe and the easiest way would be to marry a white lady. I was there, why not give it a try, they thought. After a few days of laughs and adjustments, I began to feel a "childhood joy", the confidence to just allow myself to be "Who-I-Am", and a calmness taking over my spirit. Within myself, I could sense that with each day that passed I felt more at home, more at ease with myself and with all the people surrounding me.

I started to recognize that silent but determined voice within, which I hadn't heard so clearly since I had been a kid. I felt the elation of hearing and understanding my inner voice again, and that my inner guidance was in perfect tune. Each day, I could sense these words within myself: "Jana, let go of worries and fully enjoy. You are here where you desired to be. Live in the moment, live in the Now. Do you smell the fragrance of the air, do you feel the sun rays on your face, do you truly taste the deliciousness of this piece of fruit you just ate and do you see the colorful ambience surrounding you? Focus on all of that, and each moment and your life will become overwhelmingly full. Don't think, just let go, and enjoy all of these sensations." With this mindset, I could sense an inner power and clarity, a confidence in the certainty of my life's course, taking control. My determination to stay in the embrace of Mother Africa was so powerful I cannot really describe it in words. I just knew with every cell of my body that what I was searching for was revealing itself to me each day and was awaiting discovery. Each morning I felt like a child exploring a fascinating new world. Each day I learned something new about people, about their customs, values, challenges and survival. They go through amazing trials on a daily basis but always keep that optimistic outlook on their lives. I saw how even small business ideas could actually provide enough money for people to survive. Men and women on the streets were selling water in small plastic bags, freshly



squeezed juices, Coca-Cola, pieces of sugarcane, pineapple chunks, samosas (triangle shaped dough filled with minced meat or vegetables) and beef on small sticks. They were offering all sorts of nuts: ground nuts, peanuts, cashews. Biscuits were also sold in small packets, and sweets of all sorts. Men were selling chargers for phones, cologne, soap, and everywhere, credit for cell phone use. But most widespread was the business of selling small handkerchiefs.

I found out that each African, young or old, carries one each day to wipe sweat off their faces and it is as important as their underwear. It is always a cotton handkerchief. I remember my late 90-year old Slovenian grandfather always carrying one tucked into his shirt sleeve.

I was thrilled to see the skill of women carrying huge loads balanced on their heads - mangoes, bananas, freshly cooked corn, or matoke (green bananas that need to be cooked). Immediately I reached for my camera to capture them as I felt in awe of their abilities.

They looked beautiful, having innate skills which white women never acquired. One young lady saw me and asked me if I wished to try ... and with excitement I did. But I failed almost immediately, dropping a whole basket of bananas on the floor. It was absolutely ordinary seeing mamas selling wares, with children tied on their backs in their traditional beautifully colored fabric wraps called "chitenje". It was interesting to see these children,

always calm and relaxed, rarely crying. I later found out that being tied on their mothers' backs actually keeps them calm, feeling their mother's bodily warmth and heartbeat.



How old is life?

People ask

How old are you?

You pause here and reflect

*because what you are going to say
could defy the laws of gravity.*

This is like saying

How old is life?

Or when has the universe began?

Or since when has a bird start singing?

Inside a single string

the cosmos pulsate with exuberance.

Marry love now and enter

this moment with me.

Guthema Roba

Building school for Maasai children in Mto Wa Mbu (Tanzania)

For New Years 2009, my parents decided to give me most wonderful gift, a marvelous safari trip to three Tanzanian national parks. I enjoyed following The Big Five (lion, elephant, buffalo, leopard, rhino) in Ngorongoro's vast crater. The next day, Tarangire National Park inspired me with its huge population of elephants, impalas, buffalos and zebras. For the last day I chose to go to Manyara National Park, where I admired the area's largest population of giraffes. The safari firm included two Australians in my tour group who told me the story of another inspiring Tanzanian lady - and I decided to meet her and see if I could help her towards her dreams. Mama Anna Moshi was a middle aged lady, Sukuma by birth, teacher by profession. Her grand dream was to one day build a school for Maasai children who are very intelligent but often lack opportunities for education. The Tanzanian government has been trying to abolish the nomadic lifestyle of the Maasai. The children are required to walk to town schools if they wish to get primary education. The closest public schools are sometimes more than 50 km away from the Maasai villages by Lake Manyara. Mama Anna's dream was to build a school and dormitory for only Maasai children. The dormitory would be used by those kids who lived too far away from

school, and could not walk there on daily basis. She took out her 60s' retired benefits and her entire family supported her project. Under the guidance of her retired husband who was a banker by profession and her children's, they managed to contribute the seed capital that they then leverage to get loan from the commercial bank. What she managed to build was only one block of two classrooms and two wooden shacks where around 100 Maasai children attended school. Luckily, she did find support to pay her teachers' monthly salaries from the small fee contributed by the few from wealthier society, but the need for more space to accommodate all of the children was pressing. She badly needed to finish work on the two more school blocks (total of four classrooms). Various banks denied her more construction loans and she was stuck. I decided to visit her and see if I could help make her dreams become reality.

When I reached her village, Mto Wa Mbu (Mosquito River - The size of the mosquitos was enormous!) I asked around where I could find Mwalimu (the respectful phrase in Swahili for a teacher) Anna Moshi. I followed the directions I was given and continued on a dusty path which was nicely shaded by banana trees and a few coconut trees. It was a beautiful scene. When I came to the school I got to meet this inspirational woman, who showed me around her compound. The school was new and not a whole generation was yet enrolled. I was introduced to ten children whom she had adopted

from the streets and given safe shelter. She explained the immediate need to educate Maasai children as their nomadic lifestyle would almost certainly change in the next few decades. It was therefore important to give as many children as possible a better education to find success in their new lifestyle. She needed funds to buy bricks and cement to finish building the classrooms and dormitory. It was the holiday season, so I decided to ask my extended family and friends not to buy me presents for New Year and my birthday (February 24), but rather to send me the amount they would spend on my gifts. I again turned to Slovenian Rotary clubs for help, and again some kindly assisted with donations. I gathered all the funds I received and offered them to Mama Anna to complete her project. When she saw what I held in my hand she gave me the warmest and longest heartfelt hug and a few tears rolled down her cheeks. She told me it was God and the power of prayer that had brought me to her. I stayed with her for a while and got to know more of her life stories. I felt her love in the immense strength and clear vision she had for Maasai children who had found another mother.

After my donation was used I left but it was a most satisfying feeling seeing Mama Anna's dream fulfilled. Classrooms were finished and even had electricity installed indoors, a rarity, which enabled children to study after sunset. I promised her I'd be spreading more news about her commendable job and try to get more assistance. A few months later,

she shared photos with me of painted classrooms with glass windows and a finished dormitory with donated indoor furniture. Today, 500 Maasai angels are enrolled in her school. Out of those, more than 80 reside in her dormitory. I have been totally amazed and inspired by her, that her dream had finally been actualized. I am also proud that my dear family, friends and donors could be part of this story of success. I have been receiving regular reports on how she, her staff of Maasai teachers and children were doing. Last year, her school was in the top 50 best performing schools in the whole of Tanzania, and all the pupils in class 7 successfully finished their final tests to qualify for secondary schools. Now that's a marvelous success! Once again children showed that all they need is just to be given the opportunity of decent education and they will impress everyone beyond all expectations.



Grace can find you anywhere

*Something deep from within
wants to speak:-
You're timeless truth and
you don't have to flee to the caves
to know this.
Be where you are now
and stay open, receptive
and totally penetrable like the earth,
Grace can find you anywhere.*

Guthema Roba



Maasai traditions

I used the time I spent with Mwalimu Anna Moshi to learn as much as possible about Maasai culture. I visited nearby villages where I saw some of the longstanding traditions of this wonderful ancient society. It is a patriarchal society, where men make the decisions and women usually follow their direction without opposing them. Maasai men are cow and goat (sometimes even camel) herders. One family can own more than 150 cows which are their prime possession. It can require up to 100 cows as a dowry to the father of a future bride. The Maasai take good care of their cattle, grazing them most of the day, and passing down their herd to the next generation. If the area where they live is not too dangerous and has few lions or leopards in the neighborhood, even young boys of only six or seven can be trusted with the task. Maasai men have always been known to be very skilled and brave warriors, sometimes fighting lions in order to protect their precious cows or goats. Because of their skills, many Maasai are employed in towns as night-watchmen.

The "Maasai warriors" are famous for their courage at fighting wild predators and regularly drink cows blood mixed with milk and chew a herb called miraa. The second reason for their warrior spirit must come from their forefathers. They were taught that God gave the Maasai all the cows of the world. So every time Maasai tribesmen came into a new unknown

area and saw cows, they claimed them as their new possessions. Of course such actions were not acceptable to the cows' real owners so there were almost always violent battles.

Women take on the traditional roles of cooking, milking, washing clothes, taking care of children, fetching firewood and water. They skillfully can carry water home for many kilometers from rivers or wells. When it is time to take care of personal hygiene, women and children bathe together and men cannot be near them. The same rules apply when they are eating. They dine separately, men eating first, with women and children eating after the men have finished.

Men dress in wool woven blankets called "shuka". Underneath they wrap one or two very colorful cotton fabrics. Most shukas are bright red, with either small white stripes or small black and red squares, though men can wear shukas of other colors. But women do not wear the same shukas that men do. They have different colors and styles. Men will also always carry a "panga" knife, a sharp 30 cm blade in a leather sheath (etui), and a long stick which they use as a prop to lean on while watching their grazing cattle.

In their leisure time men play the traditional game bao/omweso. It is a game where two players "steal" each other's pebbles/seeds, which are placed in 16 shallow holes on each side of a board. Usually they just play for fun, but at times they play for few shillings or tin of maize. I did hear about two men

playing a heated game of bao/omweso with a wife at stake, as the whole village stood around and cheered watching them play. That could have been just a story, though people swore it was true. Maasai men design their own shoes. They use car tires for soles and shape them into stylish sandals. They don't use glue but rather use nails to attach leather strips to the soles. Men who take their cows for grazing can walk up to 50 km a day while searching for grass for their cattle. That's why they really do need strong shoes that can hold up for long distances in the baking heat of the savannah. The Maasai are most known for their stunningly beautiful jewelry made of small colorful beads. Men wear beaded bracelets and anklets; women fashion beautiful necklaces in different shapes. Each Maasai clan can have distinctive jewelry that varies from others. Some make necklaces for women in round shapes strengthened with wires. Some use a cow's tail hair, while some have ring shaped necklaces as narrow as their necks, some as wide as their shoulders. Women never wear beaded bracelets; they are only worn by men. Women wear wrist ornaments that are plastic or made from tires. Boys cannot wear such bracelets. They are only given to a boy who proves that he possess the true strength of a man. When they are around 12-16 years old, boys undergo traditional circumcision and they do it without any anesthetic or alcohol. Boys of this age are gathered together only every four years for this ritual to be performed. For years they study how

to put themselves in a "trans" state, where they can endure the pain as elderly men with razors cut off the foreskins of their penises. Afterwards, leaves of a local plant are put on the wounds to speed healing. Male circumcision is a very common practice in East Africa serving many purposes. It gives better hygiene and cleanliness, and it is proven that removing a man's foreskin protects, to some degree, against spreading HIV/AIDS. After all the boys are healed, celebration follows through which they officially transition into adulthood. In that ceremony bracelets with various colors are given to them: red with black and white strips; light blue with orange and black stripes; yellow with red and black stripes. When men wear these bracelets, ladies in the village know they are officially mature enough to be husbands. Girls become ready for marriage when they get their periods. In some Maasai clans they mark a girl's first period with a specific colored necklace so men can recognize who is ready for marriage. They can get married as young as 15 years of age. They told me that they are not monogamous, but that wives can be shared. The stick that men carry with them is placed in a certain position at the entrance of a home to mark that they are "busy". Families are pretty big, averaging four to five children per family. Men are allowed to marry more than one wife, as long as the dowry is paid. STDs are therefore spread among many members of the community and subsequently children are born with diseases too. The government has been trying

to assist them in diminishing the percentage rates, but due to the Maasai's nomadic lifestyle, it has been really hard to maintain any healthcare records or run effective health care regiments. Maasai people are well known for their beautiful faces and also for the big holes in their earlobes. They try to make the holes in their earlobes as big as possible, just to the point that the flesh doesn't rupture. First the holes are made with a needle, then they put small straws in the holes, and then they gradually add thicker and thicker twigs. In the last stage, beautiful earrings are inserted, with men and women both wearing the same style. A Maasai house is called "manyata". It is made of branches covered with the skins of cows and goats and normally has two spaces. One area is reserved for a fireplace on which dinners are prepared. After a meal, the fire keeps the house warm well into the night, as they sleep in the second small space of manyata. They use a mattress if they can afford it, but most sleep on mats made out of straw. Men always sleep on their backs and put a low chair under their necks. It supposedly keeps them alert and ready for any danger outside the house, where their cattle spend the night. Women do not use chairs - they can have a peaceful sleep. Despite all the challenges they have faced, the Maasai have remained true to their ancient traditions and deserve to be congratulated. I truly hope they will remain who they are, despite the technology invading their lives and endangering their native

customs. But they are adjusting and are quick to learn. Many Maasai own mobile phones which does make it easier to communicate between distant villages. They have a funny custom putting their mobile phones inside their earlobes holes when they are strolling around town.



In her dreams

*Life has seen you in her dreams
so many times way before
you came here in this form.
She is not interested
in your education
or what you do for a living.
She is interested in you.
She is fiercely in love
with your heart.
So don't be ashamed
of being yourself my dear friend.*

Guthema Roba



Your destiny

*This is your destiny –
to become a vibrational masterpiece,
to become the most exquisite song,
the most haunting, healing melody –
the most intoxicating, delightful waves
of dancing energy and light –
so that people cannot help but run
to be near you just as we joyfully
run to greet the sparkling sea –
as we gratefully turn our face
towards the radiance of the sun –
so that people can thank God
that you are alive, here and now
because just by thinking of you
they feel absolutely certain that
they are on the right planet*

Guthema Roba

About Jana, Bogdan, Guthema and Malawi



Jana Dular

Jana is a graduated lawyer by profession, and a fearless humanitarian by her whole heart. She was born on 24th February 1986 in Novo mesto/Slovenia. She concluded primary and secondary education in Novo mesto and continued to University of Law in Slovenia's capital Ljubljana.

In 2011 she moved to Malawi where she established her humanitarian organisation ELA and started assisting hundreds of children, youth and women towards better education and brighter future.



Bogdan Kladnik

Bogdan is an award-winning photographer, filmmaker, extreme sportsman, writer, designer, author of 57 books and 120 calendars and the founder of Guardians of Universe, an environmental movement protecting children and nature worldwide.

You can follow his work on: 'FB Bogdan Kladnik photography' or website:

www.bogdankladnik.com

Or just follow him wherever he goes.



Guthema Roba

Guthema Roba was born and partly grew up in Ethiopia, East Africa, before he immigrated to the United States. He is the author of two books: 'Please Come Home' and 'Wake Up and Roar'.

He writes poetry on a daily basis and lives in Minneapolis with his wife and two daughters.

Follow him on:

www.guthemarobapoetry.blogspot.com



Beautiful Malawi

Malawi lies in central Africa. It is bordered by Tanzania to the north, Zambia to the west, and Mozambique to the east and south. Its population is 15.9 million people. One of Malawi's great attractions is its diversity of natural landscapes. Country is most known by the third largest freshwater lake in Africa. It is 585 km long by 80 km wide. Malawi has not been a premier African tourist destination, but it is a real jewel for those who do visit. It is known as the 'Warm Heart of Africa' for a very good reason. The Malawians are some of the friendliest people that you will ever meet.

About ELA, GPI and Books with a Cause



ELA organisation

ELA was established as a Slovenian and Malawian non-governmental organisation in 2011. It has been active in northern parts of Malawi (Nkhata Bay district and Mzuzu town) with numerous educational programs. 250 school children are daily visiting ELA's centre for literacy, English and mathematics workshops and sport activities. ELA has two youth clubs with more than 500 members, who participate in different sport activities (football club, Taekwondo and volleyball clubs), drama/theater groups, singing, dancing and poetry groups. They are showcasing their talents and through that try to collect funds for their further education. Visit our homepage: www.ela-malawi.org



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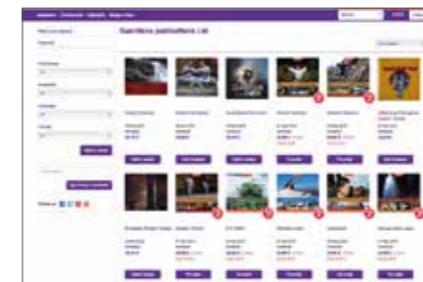
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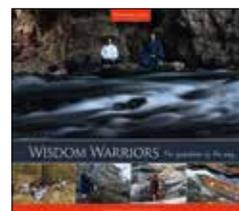
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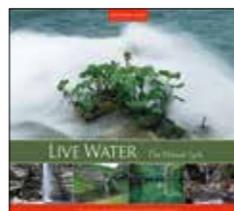
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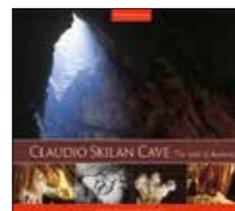
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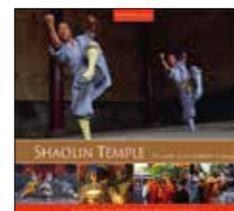
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Photographing in Malawi

I made most photos for this book in March 2016 while visiting my dear friend Jana in Malawi. But it was just impossible to follow all her work in three African countries in only 14 days, therefore we used some photos from Jana and her friends to complete the book. Heartfelt thanks to: Jon Lee, Tea Dolinar, Mirjana Kegl, Bernarda Nemeč, Simona Šivec, Nina Volčanjk, Mojca Zajc (p.24, 36, 40, 44, 54, 60, 68, 74, 82, 101).

What to say about photographing in beautiful Malawi other than just: I hardly wait to go back! It is one of the greenest and most beautiful countries I have ever seen - with the warmest and kindest people I have ever met.

Guthema's poetry

In this fast-paced world where everyone seems to be in a great hurry and where our life is almost reduced to an everyday emergency, Roba's poetry helps us to slow down, open our heart and experience the simplicity, joy and infinite abundance that is already buried deep within us. These simple and short poems are a welcome alternative to the intellectual obscurity and dryness of much modern American poetry. They are effortless to read. In fact, they don't require energy: they provide energy. They gently draw the mind into the heart, quite literally, infusing warmth into the body and clarity into the intellect. The crystal-hearted openness of these poems brings American poetry back to the ancient devotional tradition of Rumi, Hafiz, Mirabai, Laladev, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Theresa. Reading these poems is a spiritual practice of healing. His books "Please Come Home" and "Wake Up and Roar" have helped hundreds and thousands of seekers from around the world to wake up from dream state and see their limitless beauty and generosity.



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