

'Auntie Joy' humbled by summer in Malawi

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Joy Miller pals
around in a
pickup bed
with children
at the Rafiki
Village in
Mzuzu,
Malawi,
during a
school lesson
on ground
transportation.

'Auntie Joy' humbled by summer in Malawi

By Teresa Young

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PLAINVIEW—Joy Miller has spent the last few years at [Wayland Baptist University](#) taking classes and getting involved in experiences that will prepare her for her future career ministering to young girls.

So it came as some surprise to her that a summer missions endeavor on the other side of the world served not so much as a practice session but as additional training.

Miller, a junior religious education major from Amarillo, spent two months of her summer in Mzuzu, [Malawi](#), working in the children's villages of the [Rafiki Foundation](#) as an intern for a missionary there from her home church.



Wayland junior Joy Miller visits with national “mothers” from the Rafiki Village in Mzuzu, Malawi, dressed in their native dress. The “mothers” adopt orphan children and raise them in a Christian home while they are educated.

After two years learning about ministry, Miller felt she would be quite useful on the mission field in Africa. God had other lessons for her to learn, she said.

“The things I learned there are going to help me minister here, and I thought it would be the other way around,” Miller said with a chuckle. “God wanted to teach me that it wasn’t about what I can bring to the table but what he can teach me and how he can use me.”

Based in San Antonio, the Rafiki Foundation builds villages in African countries and hire native women to adopt orphans and raise them in a Christian upbringing. They operate a center for teen girls that trains them in a trade such as tailoring, cooking or the national trade of woodcarving, so they can earn a living as adults.

“Rafiki is a unique organization because they clothe, feed, shelter and educate these children. No other organization is able to do all four,” Miller said. “They really are changing lives and training people to be godly citizens as well.”

The trip was Miller’s first extended missions adventure outside the U.S., and she admitted she might not have thought twice about the opportunity a year ago. Over the course of the school year, though, God began working in her heart and calling her to Africa, even if it was for just a short time.



Joy Miller takes a moment to share hugs with three children in Malawi, Memory (seated in her lap), Alinafe (left) and Spencer (left).

“I realized I’d lived a very safe life in my little Texas box, and God really laid it on my heart to do this,” Miller said.

The trip represented a sacrifice for many, as she raised \$5,000 for her travel and expenses while in Malawi. Family, church members and even friends contributed to her fund, and the residence assistants in her dorm allowed her trip to become their “dorm project” for the semester, contributing \$200 total toward the trip.

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While in Africa, Miller taught in a preschool in the mornings, then played volleyball with the girls and tutored in the afternoons. She was also responsible for preparing materials for the art activities and other lessons for the school, working ahead for the teachers and gathering supplies to save them time later. She also planned a mini-Vacation Bible School for the

children during a school break.

She was able to assist on a medical assessment visit in the villages —what she called “real Africa”— and glimpsed the harsh reality of life on the continent. Seeing children ravaged by disease and poverty and knowing there was no way to save them all made an impact on the college co-ed.

Called “Auntie Joy” by the children, Miller especially enjoyed just getting to love the children and watch them experience things very common to American children.

“It was amazing to watch them do things for the first time, like smell crayons,” she said. “I was completely humbled. I am so blessed here, and they have nothing there but are more content than we (Americans) are. God also reminded me that there’s really no difference between them and me. I just happen to live in America and they live in Africa.”

Even though Miller said she’d love to go back to Malawi someday, her call to minister in the U.S. was confirmed on the trip.

“I loved every minute and savored everything, but I still feel very called to ministry here,” Miller said.

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