

Hi all,

Just written this - sending it to loads of people so please do introduce it with the correct level of formality compared to how well I know you 😊

Loving this place already 😊

C

Uganda journal day 1

Steps (so far!) 8057 (I don't think that's me walking - I think that's the road surface....!!!)

Car breakdowns: 1

Near misses with motorcycles: countless

Clenched teeth: at all times when being driven

Number of waterways I wouldn't let my dogs drink from because they are too filthy and even if Boris really wanted to I still wouldn't let him because it's likely to kill him: many

Number of above waterways goats were drinking from: all of them

Chickens in the road: countless

Chickens crossing the road:why?

Times I closed my eyes and waited for the crunch: 200+

Nile beers: 1 (last night - hoping for another when we reach the hotel)

Amount of times I allowed myself to narrate in my head what I was seeing in Morgan Freemans voice as it seemed fitting: 5+

Bananas buyable for a pound: 30+

I don't really know where to start. I'm sitting currently in a stretch Land Cruiser (yeah it's a thing) on a motorway (dual track - with mud patches). It is such a different world out here I find myself unable to put it into words. I shall try. It's better I look down and concentrate on this than concentrate on the "road".....

Nabil and I got into the hotel at 11:30pm last night (not the faintest what time it is back home - not totally sure what day it is - it seemed like we were travelling for days.) *gah another near miss - I'm now power concentrating on this over the road*

We sat and had a local beer (Nile - nod to my brother in laws family the Spekes that found the source of the Nile - just passed the "Speke resort" - I feel like I know royalty. I'm sure Rich would like that!). We had a heated and interesting discussion about business, oil prices, shares and then both realised it was 12:45am and possibly time for bed.

My alarm went off at 7:30.

At 8am I eventually surfaced. I had a shower - I quite enjoyed sharing the shower with a gecko - I hope he did too - he seemed pretty chilled about it. I left the shower mat so he could get out on it in case he was stuck on the tiles. There are many geckos here.

Breakfast consisted of fresh pineapple (like so sweet and fresh I got a bit emotional after the first bite), coffee and then scrambled eggs and I mean bacon is a strong word - maybe old shoe leather cooked....? I feel ungrateful but it really was somewhat on the "eating a pair of shoes" side of bacon. We met with Christopher and Jane over breakfast. As we know I'm not at my best first thing and well... you see I looked blank as they told me the plan. I don't know what the plan was - my coffee was delicious and the spot I stared at blankly was very... green.

I then unpacked today's outfit ("Friday at the end of term" me did not do "just been skiing for a week and didn't know what she brought" me any favours - idiot) I basically had to rifle through my entire suitcase to find a loose and uninspiring outfit and some flip flops. Not sure what my outfits will be like the rest of the week. No photos for me....

We set off in our vehicle. This is the first.... Story.... so apparently they take a car (in this case a Land Cruiser) and then "extend" it. So our vehicle has 8 seats with a walkway up the middle. I think the UK slightly less approved of term for this is a "cut and shut" but who am I to judge..? It's doing the job so hurray for the long Land Cruiser. I feel I should name it Derek as it shall be part of many of the stories I fear.

Our first stop was at JaJas. Who she was was explained to me in detail over breakfast. Alas, I still don't really know but she was lovely. I was seriously impressed with her son Trevor. He went to Old Swinford in the UK and then on to the top fashion college in London (everyone else had heard of it - I tried to bluff

that I had in my as previously mentioned, somewhat “unusual” outfit). He told us his business ideas with passion, energy and enthusiasm. He sounds like he has the drive and determination (and some awesome designs) to make it - I hope he does - everyone check out his company Data Original in a few months when it goes live. As a side note he mentioned he missed sport. He used to play rugby and basketball. Basketball for WORCESTER WOLVES..... (2018-2019) I watched him play!!! How cool is that?! He also taught me the Ugandan handshake (love it - ask me to demonstrate when I’m home).

We sat and had a tea (no milk, just a tea bag with water that had cooked cinnamon leaves in it) amazing flavour. We looked out across Malcolm’s (again part of the story I missed while looking blank) property which overlooked the lake. Cool breeze, cinnamon leaf tea and freshly baked peanuts (yum!!!) - yeah I could get used to this Uganda thing.

Eventually with much hugging and cool handshaking we departed for our next trip.

This trip was to the university to meet a lady that had helped Jane out with a poor student that had gone off the rails. She wanted to meet this lady - Brenda and thank her for her help. What we hadn’t taken into account was that (oh dear god we nearly just wiped out a motorbike - why did I look up?!) that the car had brake fluid leaking out of the ahhh.... thing.... And so we needed to wait for 3 hours at the university after meeting Brenda to fix poor old Derek the cut and shut.

While waiting for the car to be fixed (after meeting Brenda - total legend - wants to come and see us in the uk - I looked a bit sick while thinking about visas - lovely lady she deserves all good things in life). While waiting, I started to notice the ladies hair. There are some astonishing and wonderful hairstyles here - people manage to tame hair even more, unruly, than mine. I have picked the hairstyle I want. The agreement is that if I am needed for a ahh, formal meeting, after this adventure, then I have to retain my current “safe” hairstyle. If I am not required however I shall commiserate by getting my hair done by a local here and seeing what they can do. Now every time we see a new and more exciting hairstyle everyone asks if that is what I’m going to go for..... more on this story next week maybe.....

Just passing a van with “God is my witness” written on the windscreen (so many cars have religious messages on) I think that wisecrack writes itself with the driving round here.....

The university wait was made more entertaining by Nabil deciding that he wished to have a SIM card so he could be online whenever he wanted. This was a wonderful idea and a good use of time while we waited in the hot midday sun. The three of us waited as Nabil strode off to speak to Uma our driver (a story in himself but.... I feel this one will write itself over the time I am here). Nabil came back and Uma summoned a random motorbike for him. Nabil hopped on the back and disappeared..... we were a bit in horror but the man wanted a sim. We waited. We waited and then we waited a spot more.... Just as we were wondering what on earth to do (car still broken down and Nabil MIA) a rather triumphant Nabil showed up on the back of a motorbike - hair somewhat more “bouffant” than before and a slightly wild look in his eye. He was clutching a sim and looked smug as he activated it and checked in with everyone back home.

We waited longer while men were under the car that was held up by a jack which looked like it was made of hope and not much else. We were pleased to not witness a rather nasty incident.

As we got driving I suddenly noticed, this alien landscape with so many smells and colours that were so different - and yet.... Everything is written in English. Apparently English is the predominant language of the country. How utterly crazy.

So now we get to current situation. Driving.... Somewhere... Patrick has joined us - he is the Foag on the ground guy who is guiding us around and sort of being the middle man. Christopher has got a thirst on for a Nile - can’t say I blame him... let’s see how the rest of the day pans out....

weve stopped

There is a drink shop - the boys are buying drinks. One drink is called “Lucky flavour drink” I wonder what luck tastes like...?

As we are finishing off the drive and I feel my jet lagged self will not be wishing to write more when I could be drinking a Nile, one thing I have taken from today. There appears to be a lot less money here than England, yet a lot more joy in all the people we see and speak to. I wonder if there is a lesson in here somewhere?

C x

Sent from my iPhone

Day2

I have added a few people today. This place is insane. I think this experience really will change me, as a person, I hope for the better.

Look after yourself guys.

C x

Steps: 12578 (yet I hardly moved from the car) - hmm bumpy roads much?

Times I wanted to be a millionaire and throw money at people: countless

Genuine moments of horror: 2

Nile beers: 3 (they're strong 😊)

Nights in the same hotel: soon to be 2

We got up at 7:30. I got out of bed at 8 - look it's 5 back home and I'm just not great at mornings. Give me a break. Ange. I staggered to brekka. I remembered it was pancake day so I endeavoured to have pancake for brekka as I had a sneaking suspicion they may not know what shrove Tuesday was. I was right. After about 3 coffees I was able to try and understand the situation. Nabil had his computer out and was doing busy work with Christopher. It had a "Dad working at the office and you are a child leave it C" feel so I sat quietly and sipped coffee and ate pineapple and avocado.

Eventually I came round enough to get myself fruit juice - first I had fresh pineapple and passion fruit (like squeezed and fresh no concentrate here) then after 2 coffees the apple and ginger juice seemed like a great plan. I sat gently down with a new pancake and my juice as the boys did their busy work. I sipped gently at my jui.... BANG oh my god what if you can smell the colour 8 - ahhh... yeah that ginger was STRONG man. It like kicked me in the face like that time my horses trotted over me and kicked me in the head. We are talking serious kick. And I *liked* it!!!

Now fully invigorated and ready to face the day/world/anything we set off in Derek the cut and shut. Our first journey was to Budhaya co-op to see the work they are doing with the loan Foag gave to help the farmer plant and store their grain.

On the journey I asked Kennedy (the EADEN guy - I dunno before you ask - I was told pre coffee) about why so many of the local children were outside and not at school. I took notes as he told me. To save 3 Nile beer me being emotional I will just write facts he told me and no opinions.

The children are not at school - they are at home so they can work in the fields - what happens to girls is that the older men of the village "force" marriage at around 13 - there is no birth control. He therefore sires around 2-3 children then he moves on to another young girl. The parents do this for a variety of reasons - mainly because the older chap offers a good dowry for their young girl.

Some children go to school to be fed. If the community is strong, then they get together and offer them a big meal at schools - this stops the parents having to worry about food for them. Parents sometimes only let them go because they will be fed - they would be more use at home farming. This is rare - it is a community coming together - easy to do but requires community.

Some children run away from home to go to school.

So that's what I wrote - I want anyone I send this to that is a teacher to a) think how mature a 13 year old girl is and b) think of how desperate the children are to get an education and free themselves from this cycle. The difference education makes is incredible and can change a bleak future to a promising one. But only if they can get it. If not girls - it doesn't look great. What on EARTH is going on with the children I (in fairness used to) teach having no interest in education and being rude and disrespectful. The disparity and joy the children here would have at the offer of education is... well... it makes it hard to have sympathy for children with no interest in learning.

We discussed finances for crops and yield and again I took notes - I hope they make sense but these were the figures I took....

Rice - 1 acre - to weed fully you get 70000 shillings (\$19) takes about 4 days. Up to you how you do (2 people 2 days and share money - however) but roughly £5 a day earnings to labour on the fields. The crop will roughly earn a farmer 2.5 million shillings (\$71).

So with these figures in mind we stopped to see the work of the co-op. Now I don't feel it is suitable or appropriate for me to discuss what was covered in this meeting as it's for trustees and others to understand and decide how best to move forwards. But allow me to set the scene....

We sat in a grain storage unit surrounded by grains (soya, maize and cassava) there were possibly 20 farmers, a few different representatives and us. All in a room. Looking around the farmers, I noticed they were all dressed smartly - in interview wear, but it was all threadbare, torn and showed signs of poverty. They wanted to look smart and show us respect, they were wearing their "Sunday best" but it was.... Lacking... due to funds. I found it slightly haunting to think of these guys showing such respect to us, and yet having no resources with which to do so.

The meeting continued and I spotted 3 children. I had some haribo (thanks em - skiing leftovers) and gave it to the mother to give to the children. As we walked out the children were crowding me (more than 3!!!) and I saw the haribo packs on the floor discarded and littered - litter is a real problem in Uganda. I felt sad that the kindness I wished to show these children had resulted in teaching them a bad life lesson (littering).

We then went round some rice paddies. InCREDIBLE.... It was amazing to see how rice is grown, harvested and processed. We went round with all the farmers, about 20 random ladies that had joined the party and about 15 children. It was quite the community event and everyone wanted to see us.

On that. Now. I have always had strong looks, possibly not good, but I have a look. No one has ever really wanted my photographs, I accept that I have a face that my mother loves, but maybe, appeals to a few discerning people not... the world... with this in mind I found it incredible that literally all the farmers were trying to subtly (but not that well!!) get a photo of me. Their phones were out and they kept snapping when I looked away. I guess a white blonde (shhh no one realises surely) girl is a rarity in those parts. I felt quite special for a while.

As an aside... when asked if they had any questions (and with the future for girls as above) one of the farmers asked Foag to bring education to their community. Now. With the best will in the world, building, staffing, equipping and filling a school just is not within Foags ability or remit and Nabil sensitively and kindly explained that his hope was that the community earning more would mean they could hopefully in time create schools etc. I took this badly - I felt like it had been my father, trying to protect me from a future of married at 13, trying to offer me a future. So... (oh no...!) I asked Kennedy to get details on the children of that particular farmer - if he has a girl, I have every intention of sponsoring her through school so that her future maybe can look brighter than the normal in that village. As the saying goes - "I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do."

Anyone wanting to help me in this mission let me know - let's change the lives of young girls - we can't save them all, but maybe some...?

We left the farmers and that rural community (with no school and many girl children (looks pained)) and went on our only tourist bit of the trip (organised for me). We went to see the Nile.

Sitting drinking a Nile beer in the shade of a hut, watching the birds and monkeys. You know what I shall finish my journal there. Much more has happened. But the Nile memory will stick with me for years I suspect.

Remember guys - my favourite psalm is it (no I haven't suddenly got religious but if you know me you will know I love this)

Grant me the courage to change that which I can, the serenity to leave that which I can't and the wisdom to know the difference.

Night guys.

C x

Sent from my iPhone

Day 4

(Sorry to tired to proof read if it makes no sense apologies)

Uganda journal day 4

(Sorry about 3 - dehydration headache!)

Steps 12490

Near death car experiences: 40+

Times I actually said "oh gosh" due to road conditions and being on the wrong side of the road with a car heading our way: 3

Times god was praised for us visiting St Joseph's school: 7+

Welcome dances: 1 (need to get my form to do that when I am back)

Nile beers: 2

Sunburn: some (although as we know I don't get sunburn)

Today began as ever with the bleary eyed search for coffee after a shower. I was due to be in the slightly suspect rooms on the other side of this hotel complex. I was a bit scared of being away from all the other guys and the increased price was not so significant I couldn't cope (please understand I will return from Uganda utterly bankrupt and if you want me to do anything fun with you in the next 5 years, if it costs money - I can't!). So I am in the nice side of town with the other trustees.

Brekka this morning consisted of pineapple (obv), coffee (best for the other trustees sake) and an omelette made by a nice man that smiled a lot. I eventually came to life and we headed off out to our first visit - EADEN. Again I feel like the affairs of Foag are not mine to share so the details I will not go into, but they are basically a large group mainly funded by the Catholic Church that seek to do projects in Uganda that benefit the community and local people. I respect that deeply and listened intently trying to work out if there was anything I could do to help. These are conversations to be had with Foag, but we discussed agriculture and schools in detail and I was most interested in some initiatives they have coming up.

After we had sat outside having a PowerPoint presented from a table hastily moved for us (one of the key presenters was not well and we requested to be outside as the last thing any of us need now is to get ill). The chairs were plastic garden chairs - each was embossed with a number and EADEN written on it. Blimey when garden chairs need looking after like that what is the world coming to?

As a mark of respect they offered us lunch. Now I have been a veggie (opposite of Austria rules / to those that know what I mean?) for the entire time here as I'm a bit afraid of the meat out here. Never have I been more grateful as when they opened up the pans they had prepared and I saw the contents. There was beef (many bones and some chunks but looked a bit boney for me) and chicken (was giblets cooked up - it's a no from me), but because I had been so not meaty before, my colleagues said I was veggie and no offence was taken. I did however eat some of the other food. Rice - yum, fried cabbage - mega yum and posho. Posho contrary to my thoughts of it being a banterous term for someone posh, was actually a ahhh solid made from maize flour cooked in a pan. It was upended from the pan and served. It was stodgtastic and I rather enjoyed it. There was no real flavour but I could tell I was being nourished and I quite liked it!

We eventually made our thanks to the people and shook hands with them all and left EADEN (via a school but I just can't be bothered to explain) and headed to meet sister Margaret.

What a woman. She is a nun and she has her fingers in many pies. She first showed us youfra (youths of fransiscan) and the project she was running there employing disabled people to make school uniforms for underfunded children. All very honourable. They had saved two disabled children and offered them a better life. I saw their bedroom. If that is a better life I am afraid for what they came from.

We next visited a failed chilli plantation. I have not been with Foag long enough to fully understand but on the journey to the plantation we were told about mark. Mark was a year 1 boy. His mother lived in the slums by the railway. She had been cast aside by partner because he had a new younger girl. Mark was attending school. His mother had got in arrears with the school fees and he was no longer able to go. How

much did she owe? 400,000 shillings... or to you and me, £80. For two terms. This child was being deprived education for the price of a meal out back home. We all dug into our wallets and shared the cost between us. Mark will be back at school tomorrow. But how many marks don't have a random crew of brits come and get told and find £20 a piece....? What a cruel world. Changing a child's life with what I think most of us see as small fry money. Yet we can change the course of a life for good, just with a few pounds. I feel this may haunt me for years. Not mark. He will be fine. But how many aren't? Scary and humbling stuff

We left the chilli plantation "jambo jambo" to two cute children who kept their pigs on the land. We headed out to a school where a sponsored Foag child is.

We arrived and as we did we were swamped by small children, big children and some adults. They surrounded us and then began a 10 minute welcome song/dance. Initially I was a bit taken aback! I was unsure of the correct response. What does one do when 30 odd children are singing welcome and clapping and dancing? Then add the 200 odd small children all watching with wide eyes. I was a bit unsure but smiled throughout. What an honour to be so important to these children. What a difference just a small amount of money makes to the lives of so many out here.

We then had speeches. It was wonderful. The head boy gave a speech and handed over to the headmaster (charismatic, charming etc - made me want to throw money at the school), he handed over to a child, the child to the sister, the sister to another child, the child to Nabil, Nabil to me... wait - a speech. What? Ahh.....

300 odd eyes looked expectantly at me... I gave a short yet caring speech which I was proud of. They all looked totally blank. Either I've lost it or they had no idea what I was talking about. It would appear getting ignored by students is a forte of mine around the world not just in the uk.

I have so much more to write about,
But again my head is wondering if I have a headache due to dehydration. And I wish to sleep (10:30pm) so I will wish you goodnight.

Just think though - next time you buy a pint - that could buy a farmer a share in a cooperative for a year, next time you buy a meal out - that could school a child for a term. You can't change the world, but maybe one step at a time...?

Night guys

C x

Sent from my iPhone

Day 5

Steps: 11526 (some actually walking today!)

Imodium: not enough

Times I went "waho!" In the car to save from screaming: 2

Near misses: 20ish (much better - less lorries on the road)

Red dust: coming out of every orifice - the roads are all red dust roads

Times this emoji suited me 🤔: all day

Nile beers: 2

Chickens slaughtered: 0

Cows slaughtered: read on.....

This morning again started with my new found brekka - I have a pineapple plate with coffee then an omelette from friendly man and some toast. My stomach... ahhh.. well... I'm suffering a bit from the catastrophic change in diet and yeah... I have felt better in my life... but this is my main meal of the day and I think it's safe. I dunno what is making me so... ahh... "unwell" but yeah... I'm suffering a bit - hopefully I shall be slim and elegant on my return to England. Maybe... probably not....!!

Over breakfast Nabil leaned over and told me about the trip today. We were heading to a former children's home that was set up by a guy (I apologise his name escapes me) but with no money attached. He gave them buildings and water and electricity, then they had to sort it. The nuns stepped up to the

challenge and sister Catherine was in charge of this particular site. Nabil warned me of what had happened last visit.

Such was the joy of his visit that they had done much dancing and yulalying (or whatever the correct word is for the screaming the ladies do when mega happy) and brought him a cow. He had been asked to slaughter it (the meat would feed the children living there for a week). He had not been able to slaughter it but had been asked to cut into its still warm carcass to make the first cut which is a great honour.

I know Nabil well enough to know he is a real wind up merchant so I took this with a pinch of salt - a nervous pinch of salt, but not too much did I worry...

We all met outside and much to our dismay Patrick (Foag Uganda representative) told us Umar had texted him as he would be late as he had two flat tyres... what blasted bad luck - one is bad two is ridiculous. We therefore had an extra half an hour outside and Christopher used this to explain something to me I had not understood.

I am from a boarding school background - I am aware of national minimum standards. I am aware of the expected room requirements for a child. I had seen the room of the two yesterday and in fairness was a bit horrified. So I asked him about it. I asked him about the expectations for homes, what is and isn't ok, how we know etc...

It was a sobering conversation (argh I think I may vomit - excuse me a moment) (false alarm) Christopher explained the rooms that children in the poor rural areas live with, the lack of family support, the fathers taking on new younger models and leaving the mothers to fend for themselves with a number of children and no way to feed/clothe/house them. While I am confident that there are many committed and lovely men who stand by their women and I do not wish to tar everyone with the same brush, it would appear to be a slightly common problem and thus there are many ladies and very young children with nowhere to live (take Mark from yesterday with his mother living in a slum by the railway unable to afford his school fees - btw we received a photo of a receipt for the money we gave and Mark in school uniform so that £80 we found between us did the trick). Thus there are many children that face sleeping on the ground, outside, in dangerous areas and with no chance of food. What I saw didn't sit well with me, but it was somewhere to sleep, safe from predators (I'm in Africa remember) with food and a chance to go to school. I think putting western ideals onto a much more primitive community only leads to less children getting helped and being kept safe. It was a horrifying yet important lesson for me - just because I expect a beautiful bed for a child with a unicorn bedspread, desk for them to work at, running water and 3 square meals - this just isn't possible out here. But the efforts of the nuns and others is a damn sight better than the alternative they have on offer. This was a hard conversation to have with much "but what about..." from me and perfectly sensible and sensitive responses from Christopher. Poverty in the western world looks so different. What a stark conversation to start the day with.

Umar eventually arrived (wave of sickness again - hopefully will pass and I can write again in a sec...) 🤒

Ok so... (I'm ok... I think) we then set out to the home. Nabil took the chance to tell me again about the cow situation. He was worried I may let the side down and vom/scream/cut the cow free etc... he informed me I had to act appropriately. I was not to let the side down. I still didn't believe him but was nervous about how persistent he was. It was not helped by Patrick confirming that they tied the legs so I didn't need to worry as it couldn't hurt me (while I was hurting it)....

As we drove I listened to music. I got quite pensive about it all. It's so hard to fathom this all out. If you know me you know I always try and give my time to charities - I'm not rich after paying for my countless horses so I can't really give money, but I can give my time. I'm a trustee for a nursery, I am just getting involved in an active listening project for homeless people in Worcester. I want to give back. I realise how lucky I am, I realise how blessed the life I lead is and I want to help people that need me as I can. But what do you do about millions of people all needing help, a few quid here and there could change lives for the better forever, but how do you decide who to help, how can I with a clear conscience pay for my £70 a night hotel when that would pay for a farmers entire crop for a year and make his entire family safe. How can I find and help the people, how indeed do I work out who to help? And money is much less available to me - selfishly I keep all those horses. How do I live with myself being spoilt and these people struggling to find £5? I'm actually struggling to comprehend it all. I cannot change the world. But maybe one step at a time, maybe if I can change the fortunes of a few - it's not enough but it's better than nothing. Apparently mother Teresa wrote "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples". Hmm maybe I can...

"We're here! For goodness sake Cecilia - don't let us down with the cow!"

Argh! I forgot about that. We had arrived at the home. We were greeted by lots of nuns and farmers and people whose lives had been changed by Foag (Moses - who had been disabled as a baby and left in the rubbish. Crows had pecked his head. He had been found by a dr passing and given to the sisters to raise. He was 25+ and an adult - he walked in crutches and had a hat on - to cover the scars of where he had been pecked as a baby) good grief what kind of starter story is that. My brain scrambled I got out of Derek the cut and shut and looked out across the amazing view. I spotted a small cow tethered to a post. Oh god....

After we were greeted by the sister, and the farmers, and more sisters, and the dr doing the life changing club foot surgery, we were guided to a room for the ceremony. Nabil asked the sister in front of me if they were slaughtering a cow in our honour. She said "of course! He is over there tied up! Why else would he be there?"

Oh god. Oh good god no.

We went into the room and sat down. Nabil gave me a mega marked look, told me to sit down next to him so we could kill the cow together - he wouldn't leave me on my own. Patrick gave me a reassuring nod. I sat with wild eyes, heart rate at about a million beats a minute, mouth dry and horrified. I can't kill a fatally injured animal to speed up the process - how on earth could I kill a beautiful cow with a big soapy nose, it's markings a bit like a heart on its head - beautiful black and white boy - young.

We sat and eventually after many speeches (obviously I heard none of them I was trying my darnedest to prepare for the horror awaiting me). Eventually sister Catherine handed me a huge knife and said "it is time"....

She dramatically removed a cloth from the table in front of us and a cake with all our names and "welcome" written on it was there. She laughed wickedly and invited me to "kill the cow"....

I turned to Nabil and he took one look at me and collapsed in hysterics with the sister and Patrick. I'll get him back. I don't know how, I don't know when, but I will....! I rose to the occasion and held the knife in a "stabby" way and joined in on the joke. (The cake was delicious by the way - I was somewhat concerned about us eating cake while children were starving but I don't understand much but manners are everything so I hoovered it down).

I then met Augustus the cow and gave him a pat on the head and ruffled his ears. There were MANY photos taken by the nuns of this moment and shared with much hilarity. Augustus lives to see another day!!

We proceeded to look round the home, they showed us their certificate that allows them to be a children's home and then we met a few children and moved on.

The next few hours were spent looking at farms - again not my place to comment further on this, safe to say the farmers were wound up about money and were talking passionately about what they should do if their crop sold for 50000 shillings less than expected - it would ruin them (thats £10 to me and thee) - yet again it's another world. I carry on me about £200 in cash at the moment. I could change their futures for good. But how? And who?

Eventually we were invited for a "little snack" before we left. This was a full blown Ugandan meal. There was Matoke (yuk cooked green banana yuk), chicken giblets (again yuk) rice (safe), bamboo shoots cooked in salt, chips (oh hello...) and some pasta. I was feeling then much the same as I am now and was not at all hungry, but to refuse the food would have been at best rude so... in I dove....

After we finished our meals the nuns presented us with presents (isn't that the wrong way round - worry not dear reader - we clubbed together and gave them much woddage- who wouldn't?). They gave us all coffee, the boys got key rings and welcome to Uganda signs and the girls got bracelets and earrings (I don't have pierced ears - feel free any of you that do to drop me a line and have some Ugandan bead earrings).

I gave Augustus one last relieved pat and got in Derek. Sister Catherine wants me to go and teach maths at the school there and stay in the home for a month or so over one summer. I have her number... we shall see...!! (Ripples to be made?)

So to now - I feel sick (still) and have had an avocado for supper and 2 Nile beers. I am tired and will go to sleep. So much to think on. So many things I can do to help. Where do I start, how do I start and when I come back does the story end there?

Remember - grant me the courage to change that which I can, the serenity to leave that which I can't and the wisdom to know the difference.

Sleep well dudes.

C x

Sent from my iPhone

Day 6

Steps: 8095 (and each of them were a struggle)

Cow jokes played on me by nuns today: 0

Times I have been texted by Ugandans or have met that I didn't give my mobile number to: 2 (how did they get my number?!!)

Near death car experiences: 6+ less than usual - shorter journey. But bare in mind one of these was so bad I braced myself for the crunch.

Main meals consumed heartily: 1

Time spent regretting that: from then to now

Times I heard backstreet boys "I want it that way" reggae style: 1 (which is 1 more than I needed in my life ever)

This morning started at 5am when I had to get up to... ahhh.... "Powder my nose" urgently... (and so it continues) I then weakly went back to bed gently sipping at water and lamenting my life choices. I eventually fell back to sleep and slept fitfully. Eventually a child was weeping outside my room and I wondered how long I had until my alarm went off... except... I hadn't set my alarm! Argh it was 8:15 (actually quite impressed - could have been much worse!) I staggered to shower and try and come to life. I went down to brekka. I had my now "usual" pineapple and coffee followed by an omelette by the guy that smiles a lot. We discussed the plan for today with little emotion.

We were to go to one of the homes like yesterday (Christopher told me it is Leonard Cheshire that set the homes up - known as Cheshire homes) we were to meet some of the children - present and past and look at the fields they are using and how the plans we had are going. I got into the car (gently - gosh I am frail at the moment with my poor tumtum) and allowed myself to watch the world go by for a moment.

My noticings on this journey were this:

All the buildings round here seem to have advertising on them - not sure why, but they are all brightly painted advertising something. From telephone companies (like most of them are this) to coke via soap and condoms. I think I would rather live in the soap house than the condom house, but I guess that's preference huh?! I wonder if they get paid for the painted fronts - I wonder if there's a scale depending on "offensive nature" of advertising.... Hmmmm...

There are a lot and I mean a LOT of coffins on the side of the road. Stores selling pineapples, chickens, mangoes, beds, doors they are all there. I just can't imagine buying a coffin from the side of the road - I mean - do you buy your own or is it when someone you love has called it a day? Do you just nip down to the roadside for a coffin? I mean. I can't see how this works but. Maybe it's a cultural thing. "Darling could you nip and get a chicken, two pineapples and a coffin on your way home..."

There are goats, cows and chickens literally everywhere. Just roaming. The goats and cows are tethered, the chickens just seem to wander around - along with chicks, turkeys, ducks, they're all there just trundling round enjoying themselves! I suspect their end is not so great but they appear to just roam around the roadside scratting/grazing - it is so different from home! Can you imagine just tethering a goat to the side of the road? Can you imagine?!

There was advertised on the side of one house a healthcare service. I rather feel with the state of healthcare back home (no disrespect to drs I know they are doing the best they can with what they have) but it was called Fukang healthcare. I may be wrong but I think that joke writes itself... as I was gently chuckling and snorting to myself about that slightly rude joke I was informed we were nearly there...

We met the sister who was another bright and driven woman. She was there with a few "lesser" sisters (not sure of the hierarchy but she was clearly the boss) - the either two were wearing T-shirts and just fabric tied round their waists - they were the chefs. We were invited in to sit down and have coffee. (Oh great coffee - just what my stomach needs - I mean was the water ok, oh gosh help me!!)

We were introduced to a chap called Issac - now I have been pretty close to my chested about Foag things currently as it's not my place to share them - but I tell you this to help you understand the situation out here. Issac had had polio - both his legs did not work. He was 40, he had 1 child (the other had died from malaria I think it was as he had been untreated). Issac had been through college and learned IT but has not been able to put it into practice. He was pitching a business (dragons den style but without us having any prewarning he just sort of did while we were drinking our coffee - 🤔). His plan was so not thought out it was sad, he was many things but not a business man, but he wanted our help. This was not foags style of work so it fell to us as individuals. He wanted a blasted lot of money and he really wanted the money to allow security for his wife and child. But he was clearly not going to succeed with his "business plan" as it was. He was just going to lose the money and get himself in a mess. It was so hard to be there and have someone try and get you to help them with something clearly and obviously going to fail to my slightly more shrewd and cynical eye. I was incredibly impressed with Nabil. The other 3 of us sort of sat floundering, opening and closing mouths unsure what to say or do. Nabil just stepped up, gently explained the (oh so) obvious flaws in his plan, suggested what he needed to do, where he could improve and promised no money in any way. It was so gently and sensitively done, poor Issac had clearly seen us as likely to save him and he was devastated we weren't going to, but Nabil did it so kindly and caringly. I hope one day to have the sensitivity and generosity of spirit he showed at that time.

After Issac had gone we went out to the farms - first to meet the farmers. Again threadbare Sunday best, lots of farmers clearly trying to impress the visitors - my heart breaks that they need us to survive and feel so dependent on us. This world is so unequal - just born into different worlds. Those poor guys were hoping we may help them with things that were so darn trivial. £10 here and there. I mean. To change a life and completely reverse a path leading to poverty or worse, just needs a few pounds out here. But how do you select the few that get the pounds? My head still hurts from it all. I'm such a black and white and logical person, I care, but I want solutions not problems. I'm not sure I can see a solution to this. And that makes my head hurt more than so many things I have been through before.

We met Sofia. I'm not quite sure how to explain her. Another driven woman - disabled and operated on thanks to the sisters, she qualified as a nurse, worked 2 jobs to keep studying and is now accepted as a dr! She was given a piece of land by a grateful patient to build a hospital on. She is one girl, sponsored throughout her schooling and she is trying to build a hospital. I fear she may be biting off more than she can chew. As the saying goes (although it is offensively poor science but I shall allow it to illustrate my point) "aim for the moon, if you fall you will land among the stars." I fear she may fall but I hope the star still shines bright for her - goodness knows she deserves it.

The farmers gave a speech, then we were given figures. So many figures. Season 2, soya bean bulked was 2.4 tonnes which was 3.2 tonnes a half acre down on.... *sorry I lost myself there* - I was struck by how that needed to be on a nice spreadsheet - maybe even with a nested if to spoil us - I was reminded of

“meetings that could have been an email” - this was figures that needed to be a spreadsheet. The boys duly took notes with these numbers vomited at us as I watched 2 chicks playing behind the farmers. When they walked straight under the seats and into the middle of the circle we formed, most of the farmers didn't notice, but one did and she caught my eye and we both smiled broadly. She didn't speak English, but a smile is international.

Eventually everyone was all figured out. We left the meeting area and headed off to the first farm. It was too far away for us to walk so we all piled into Derek the cut and shut. Derek has 6 seats in the back, 2 in the front. Patrick wanted us to leave the random farmer ladies that wanted to join in behind. I insisted they come if they wanted. So. In we all piled. There were 8 in the back and 3 in the front. I was on the floor in the middle. It had a mega party feel. The ladies were shouting “on tour” a lot and loved it. Nice to bring a bit of joy into all our lives.

We saw many farms - the journey between them hilarious with “on tour” and much wicked laughter from the ladies - I saw weevils, scary beetles that look like buttons but are parasites apparently, a praying mantis and one of the ladies gently pointed out something on my shoulder. It was “spiderzilla” I'm not scared of spiders but this guy probably had his own printed cards with “web designer” written on them that he gave out at functions. I mean he was big. He was mega big. I'm surprised I didn't feel the weight on my shoulder.... I brushed him off with a gentle gasp. I wanted to run around crying and brushing myself off, instead I shuddered a few times and then stood nodding sagely, listening to the discussion about planting methods and ripping soil (it always sounds painful to me - not sure I want to rip soil. Maybe we could use the oxen to caress the soil or something somewhat less violent!).

They are in the midst of a SEVERE drought here. Everything is dying because there is no water. Rain is desperately wanted. It started to slightly spit with rain. The ladies from the back were loving it and singing and dancing with joy. It didn't really properly rain when we were there. Quite unnervingly as we dropped off the sort of village elder, she wanted to speak to me. She didn't speak English so her friend tried to explain. She looked at the sky, held her crucifix in my direction, put her hand on my chest - I assume she meant heart (I'm the least tactile person in the world - my expression must have been priceless) and then back at the sky and kissed the crucifix. Her friend sort of translated. “She thanks you for bringing the rain and praises god who brought you here”.... Ahhh.... I... ahhh... I had nothing. I bowed to her and hugged her and walked away. What does one say. I really hope it lobbed it down for them. Goodness knows they need it.

We eventually left the fields and headed back to the home. Sister declared that we must stay for lunch (oh dear god) and there were places made up for us all. The pans were opened and the offerings were laid out. Rice (worried about the water it's cooked in so avoiding), chips (I'm in), goat offal stew (I will never be able to not see what I saw in the pot), chicken giblets deep fried (umm), cabbage (ok) and some tomatoes. I obviously wanted nothing. I felt decidedly unwell. But they had apparently killed the chickens for us (thank you?) and I had to eat something. So I had a spot of cabbage and chips. Nabil looked at me and I looked back at him - how does one portray “I can't cope with this I'm going to vomit” in a look. I didn't manage. I was doing well until Sofia who was opposite me started sucking the goat tongue she was eating and then was crunching chicken bones. My fragile state was not helped by this. It was like that time my dad drove me somewhere on New Year's Day after I had drunk way way too much and it took every bit of my being to stop myself vomiting. I know there were conversations I should have been listening to, but not vomiting on this occasion was heading towards an extreme sport and I was giving it all I had.

Eventually we left - we were showed the bread making plant - they of course gave us some donuts (food argh 🤢🤔) to take for the journey. Our goodbyes were said and we headed back.

I'm too tired to relive the party that's going on outside my bedroom (live singing interspersed with prayers), or indeed the supper I ate down as I was so hungry (and I think we all know how it's sitting now). But today has been an interesting day.

I learn so much about myself here - I have always tried hard to do right where I can, never do wrong, do my best and be kind. It made so much sense to me and I did what I could. This place is showing me that it isn't that black and white. I can't do enough right here, so should I do nothing? We gave money to the home to help them run, I think I'm going to end up sponsoring a young girl through school (I shall explain but not now I need my beauty sleep) but what about the other children we saw today - showing clear signs of kwasihrohaocjkdneksnskaka or however you spell the protein deficiency. Their little bellies stuck out like pot bellies - it wasn't fat. It was lack of food. Should I have stopped to give them/their parents money for food? How could I just drive by? What sort of person am I if I see such horrors and do nothing - as we all know "In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing. The worst thing you can do is nothing." Yet here I am doing nothing. But is trying to help where and when I can enough? This is really confusing my morals and beliefs. Much to think on.

I'm so tired - forgive me if I don't proof read this - hopefully it will make enough sense you get the idea and I can look back and remember.

Night guys - may you never run out of Imodium.

C x

Sent from my iPhone

Day 7

Steps: 12522 (not many of them on my feet)

Words I learnt:

Muzungu - white person (bad)

Maguan - friend

Near death driving experiences: 100+ - long drive today on a dirt track with ravines in it

Selfies taken with random Ugandans: 3 (I give up with them trying to get selfies with me from miles away subtly - for gods sake just let's do this if you really want a selfie with a random middle aged woman!)

Times I got invited to a "circumcision party" yesterday: 1 (nope - no more to be offered on that story - buy me a robbos (or Nile) and we can relive it when I'm back...)

Sunburn: 3rd degree burns levels from lounging around doing nothing yesterday

Times I rolled my eyes at Nabil's behaviour and went "what is he like?": 12 (better than most days today - although his dancing in the village caused quite the stir!)

Nile beers: 2

Imodium: 0 (shhh don't tempt fate)

After sun (well body lotion as I don't have after sun) applied: 5 gallons+

This morning started a bit earlier as we had a long way to go (including through a swamp - ok....) so Umar picked us up at 9 not 9:30 (6 back home before you mock me for how late that is - and here now writing this it's 10pm so give me a break!). I had my brekka of omelette and pineapple as usual.... Don't look now but I feel ever so slightly mildly less like I'm going to die....! We were first going to meet Kobbi and then on to look at a hospital that one of the Foag trustees is interested in. We set off without Patrick today as he is not relevant in any of these projects.

We drove off to meet Kobbi and eventually found him in a village. He was severely disabled by polio and was unable to use his legs at all. He sort of walked using his feet and hands together bent double and hands and feet creating one limb. It was ingenious but not terribly elegant or indeed easy for him - I felt for him as Nabil subtly helped (carried) him into Derek the cut and shut and we headed off to his village to meet his family.

As we arrived there was much screaming (I believe the correct term is yulelieng) by the ladies in joy at meeting Jane and Christopher who had sponsored Kobbi through school. There were about 30 people there - village elders, people in their 30s, young looking wives and children. I have no idea who was who, just about worked out who Kobbis mum and dad were and who his (elegant and 19 years old) wife were. He has just had a child and named her Jane in honour of our very own Jane on the team. They wanted to show us round their place - there were many pregnant silences (with 30 odd people remember) when their English

was too bad for them to explain what they wanted and we had no idea what was expected of us. Eventually we understood they wanted to show us round the houses so around them we went. "What are the houses build of?" I asked leaning against one and sort looking inside "Cow dung and straw" ahhh *takes hand off the building rapidly as a crusty bit comes off in my hand*. We walked round - very simple idea - lovely round houses with roofs made of some kind of thatch - pampas grass maybe. Kobbi proudly showed us his house (now in a wheelchair) and we went in and looked. It had one big room, split by a curtain. On the one side was a bed, held slightly off the floor with a mosquito net above, the other side had clothes and a solar panel battery that supplied the light above the bed. Very very simple, but a nice enough space. We nodded sagely at it and were again a bit unsure (with 30 followers) what to do next. They wanted us to walk their land (not sure why - not sure why at all!) so we set off walking round admiring the land. I was interested in the banana trees and indeed the sweet potatoes and yams. I was trying to find interest in the barren ground when I was suddenly gently nudged. When I looked down it was a child that shot off chuckling. I smiled at the child and kept walking "really, going to plant this with maize - fascinating..." another nudge a smidge more persistent. I looked down to a cackling child....

There were 3 of them - about 6ish years old. Christopher tells me it is likely that children in a remote village in the middle of Uganda may never have seen someone with my colour skin before. They were so curious yet slightly scared of me. I offered my hand to them to look at - they sort of grabbed it and fought over who could hold which fingers. They were so interested with the fact I looked so different they grasped my hands so tight and kept looking up at me, then looking at each other and laughing nervously. It was one of the most humbling experiences of my life. It also raised something to me which we all agreed was a "more than 3 Nile beers" conversation. Which I haven't had today - so I shall point it out to you gently without then getting on my soapbox about it all. Forgive me if this offends you but in my fairly straightforward way let me gently point something out.

These children had never (supposedly) seen someone with my coloured skin before. They were fascinated and desperate to check I was real and then offered me friendship and kindness. Do please explain to me what on earth racism is if on a basic level, when confronted with something they had not seen before, the children chose to be interested, curious and friendly. If the natural instinct is to offer friendship with someone different from what you are used to, where the hell did we go wrong? Anyhow - before I start ranting I shall leave that there - but it's worth a thought.

My 3 children and I walked round and the bravest of the 3, a girl wearing a beautiful white dress (clearly in her Sunday best) kept offering up the odd English word for things. As we went past a cow, she very very quietly uttered "cow" and I praised her. This gave her a bit more courage and we got "banana", "goat" and "tree" as well. I then taught her "chicken" and "hand" - my chicken impression was, slightly disastrous and she thought that it was "buk buk buk chicken" that they were called!! Ops...

We went back to the house eventually after trying hard to be fascinated by lots of empty fields. The children I gently removed their vice like grips and they then sat with everyone else on the floor while they looked expectantly at us again. Then came the speeches - in their language. Not Luganda as most of them speak but a more specific one that Umar didn't understand. We sort of sat looking friendly blank. One girl did understand it and translated now and then. Nabil then made a speech and we went to make our exit. They had cooked for us a feast and put it into the guest hut. We tried hard to leave without having it but they wouldn't have it. So we sat in the guest hut. We were left alone for a brief moment and Nabil and Christopher both told me not to touch the food. Alas the water they cook with would mean that my poor British stomach would not cope at all and I would get very ill very quick. No one needs an urgent nose powder situation occurring on the road..... we sat for a few minutes alone with the food, made or thanks and left as they were bringing us a live goat as a gift. It's best we left as I quite want a goat now - and orange one and I want to call it Jinja as a play on words and after the place out here. We did not get Jinja given to us, but instead a large amount of ground nuts (peanuts to you and I).

We drove on and headed towards the hospital. The drive was long, emotional as the surface of the road was best described as "aftermath of a war zone even if there was no war it still looked like tanks had taken half the roads out". We eventually arrived there - not sure I have stopped rattling yet - so darn bumpy!!!

We got out and went into the medical centre. Where they had made us lunch (argh!!) and they sat us down in a room with sort of 80s arm chairs with a sign saying "Welcome our dear visitors". We chatted for a while (all the time with people taking videos and photos of us) and then ate lunch. Nabil and Christopher nodded their approval so I had a small bit (still a bit scared) for politeness sake.

Nabil went off to check something outside and called me over. There was a school. The building was what I can only describe as a cattle barn. The rooms had no doors or similar, they just had 3 sides. It was maths time. I watched - in one class there were about 30 children chanting counting. The child at the front (no teacher) said the number, then the class (about 30) chanted it back. 98, 98, 99, 99, 100, 100 and so on. Opposite there was a teacher in the class. She had one booklet of the type we would give the children - she was copying it onto the board for the children to copy into their books. We were causing quite the stir by being there and as I watched her with her piece of chalk, clearly in charge of both classes (thus about 60 children) I wondered about how much these children want to learn - they don't see it as a right and inconvenience. They want it, they feel privileged and they give it their all. Hmmm...

I did see one thing I want to bring home - the teacher said "hello" they responded "hello teacher" and then teacher said "how are you" and they stood up and punched the air and said "I feel much better".
8CD - watch out when I'm back - I expect this from you!!

We went round the medical centre - I found it deeply depressing. I feel again this needs leaving as Foag business, but it was hard to go round and see it all without a tinge of sadness - what they were treating and how. We westerners really don't know we are born do we?

We finished being shown round, said our goodbyes and left. I found today a bit depressing - there is such need everywhere - but we really can't save the world. And how do we chose where to start? The drive back was a somber affair for me as again I tried to work through all I had seen in my mind.

Anyhow - it's 11pm here and god knows I need my beauty sleep. My final quote for today comes from a song I was listening to - I believe it's purpose is a totally different meaning and direction but it stuck in my head as I thought of my life and I looked round (Hozier take me to church) "that's a fine looking high horse, that you got in your stables. We got a lot of starving faithful. That looks tasty. That looks plenty." Can't help but feel bad with those words in my head.

Night guys...

C x

Sent from my iPhone

Day 9??

Steps:14419

Random selfies with Ugandan men: 1 (impressively low)

Main meals: 0 (well I mean does brekka count?)

Heat in my room currently: 300000 degrees C

Nile beers: 1/2

Club beers: 2 1/2

Time I was warned the place I'm in currently is on the home office advice to avoid list: 1

I have to be honest and say I don't quite know where to start. I have some very safe and sensible things I need to write about from earlier on but... well... the situation you find me in currently really is something else. I think I shall leave the treat of all this until it's chronologically correct time, but do please note when you read what is surrounding me, it is doing so while I write all of this....

I got up this morning a little earlier as I had to pay my hotel bill for the stay in Mbale as we were moving elsewhere from today. We were going up north to Namalu. We were to look at farmers that had been given silos tomorrow and had to travel up but first we were to visit Irene. More on that in a moment - I get ahead of myself. Breakfast was the usual with the added joy of mango - local mango. It was as amazing as the pineapple and I enjoyed both immensely before smiley chef brought me my omelette.

I wanted to tip smiley chef as according to Beatrice yesterday the chefs have not been paid for months (only given board and lodgings). Thus we were all a bit keen to tip heavily. So smiley chef that looked after me needed a tip. I asked the guys how and they pointed out I couldn't do it in front of everyone and it had to be subtle. Now. I am the least subtle person I ever met. By some way. I'm awesome at keeping secrets, I literally don't tell anyone even if I only think you want it keeping to myself. But I am SO not subtle. I got up to try and achieve this goal. Noticed he was talking to the manager and went back to the

table saying "abort mission, abort mission!". He was alone shortly after and I headed over, put the money on the table and said "this is for you" and sidled off. I suspect literally the entire hotel, maybe some of the people driving by at the time and possibly it was transmitted on radio as I'm so useless at being subtle, but the way I see it is even if it wasn't subtle, my heart was in the right place.

Anyhow - we checked out - my bill was 2.5 million shillings. Yeah I put it on my plastic (how cool do I sound putting 2.5 mill on my plastic??) - I mean it's about £550 but still. I felt well cool! We met with Umar - who I now see as father number 3 (obviously papa sturdy is number 2) and off we headed.

We were looking for Irene on the road in a certain village. Fab. "What does Irene look like?" "Oh we don't know" "so we are looking for someone we don't know what they look for?" "Yes" (there was as incredulous silence after this as everyone thought I was a total moron for suggesting we wouldn't know how to find someone by the side of the road when we didn't know what they looked for - I'm such an idiot sometimes)

We found her, much time later. How we found her remains a story of luck not judgment but hey. We all piled into Derek (irene and her son Mu... ahhh. Oh gosh I forgot.... ops) We went to her new house that she had built after her old one has been flooded. She had about 20 children in her house (none of us quite got why) and was showing us around it. It looked like a house, but maybe I was missing the excitement - Nabil had given the children all a lolly - there were sugar crazed children everywhere - good luck with that in 30 mins time whoever had to deal with them!!

We then set off to her land - there she had some amazing crops placed into a stunning garden. She had the benefit of some really good land - right by the river so water was less of an issue, and the soil was great as it was near the river! She was growing some great crops - by far the best we have seen. She was doing really well and I was hugely impressed with what she had achieved. She clearly worked hard.

I have however noticed something. I may be becoming a cynic to it all, but I feel my journal as ever is mostly for me, so I must write what I feel to help remind myself of what was going on. Even when being watched by a tarantula (keep reading)... there appears to be a lot of money we have given to some spectacularly worthy causes. But literally every. Single. One. Has asked us for more money. Not one has gone - thank you for what you gave us, here is what we have done, thank you for helping us grow. All of them have shown us what they have done then said they need a lot more from us otherwise they will fail.

I feel like sometimes people need to try and help themselves a wee bit more. The poverty is undeniable, the need is unquestionable, but... when we help, surely it should be a one off, then you should support yourself - we set you on your feet and then you learn to walk then run then fly. There seems to be no drive to better themselves and it stresses me a little. I can sum this up best with my favourite educational quote - it's about teaching but I reckon you guys will get what I mean.... "A child's mind is not a vase to be filled but a fire to be lit" we give you the tinder and matches - light your fire!! Anyhow - maybe I am tired and grumpy, but it just strikes me as sad that no one takes the help and runs with it. Enough on this for now.

So after we finished at Irene's garden which was truly impressive, we headed for Namulu. Little did I realise that we were in for a safari adventure on the way. We went through a national park to get here - and we saw some astonishing wildlife - mostly deer like things, but we also saw a wild ostrich (how cool is that?!) and a blue starling - look them up - it was stunning!! On the return journey I hope to see more and exciting things - I'm praying we get what Nabil got a few years back - some cheetahs!! We shall see.

There was one moment when driving which I 100% do not blame Umar for but it was nearly the end of me. We were driving along as usual at about 50 I would think and there was a hump in the road he did not see. Like a speed bump - taken at 50mph. Because I am in the back, I was flung up in the air - stopped only really by my seatbelt. My head crunched *hard* into the roof of Derek. I have a headache currently from it. A somewhat near death experience! Doesn't my head hurt?!?

A small bit of farming cooperative stuff happened when we got here, but the main bit will be tomorrow so it was not really of much note - except they had the cutest puppy ever and I forgot my "no touching dogs in Uganda you haven't been vaccinated for rabies" rule and was playing with it. You could see all its ribs and it was tied up with no water and in the sun. Patrick and I gave it some water but I felt uneasy leaving it. I'm sure it was an oversight but it made me a little uneasy...

So we come to our current location. We are at a guest house owned by the friend of a friend of someone that knows someone that once knew Malcom (as we know that story originated before coffee and I have no idea who he is but it's way too late to ask now so I just smile and nod charismatically). So this is a bit different from our normal hotels. It has a much more... "authentic" feel. I am in a hut currently. I have no running water. I have a toilet and a bucket with some water.... there is a gecko in my bathroom but hey - it's his patch not mine. There is electricity but the light switches look somewhat exciting and I fear I may end up in a bit of a mess (would it turn my hair straight I wonder?) were I to use it.

I used my torch to go for a tiddle (didn't use the bucket - bit scared of that and was a bit dark) and then as I was coming to settle into my bed, I thought I would have a quick check behind it. So... yeah.... There is a spider so large even I was a bit shocked by it. I'm under a mosquito net so feel like he may not make it to me, but he's definitely watching me.... It's an interesting way to try and sleep - maybe he will guard me... maybe the net is his web... who really knows...?!

Supper was not ready until 8:30 - I ate some peanuts - bought from Kobbis family if you remember. We were eventually (after 2 club beers (not Niles what is this?!) which were brought by a man on a Boda Boda - can't cope with trying to explain headache!!) we were invited in for supper. Now what I have neglected to mention was that we went to the dining room when we first arrived and saw a dead chicken, head underwater, in the open and heat, half plucked, rigor mortis set in. Guess what supper was....? Nabil and I looked in horror at the goat stew, chicken stew and yam. There was pasta with it. I had a touch of that. Christopher ploughed through the chicken and the goat. I do hope my musings help you to see a genuine fondness for Christopher as he is a good man - but in my life I have never admired anyone more than I did him when he ate the chicken and goat having seen what we saw.... it was hugely brave - possibly foolhardy as time will tell. But very brave!!

So to now. I am in my room - it's about 29 deg c - the mosquito net covering me had mosquitoes inside - I am under the covers but somewhat hot - but not bitten. Who knows whether I will be better off bitten and cooler? The Sturdy's room is still under construction (it's 10pm) and much hammering and work is going on. I have no idea when those poor souls will get to bed - I am fascinated to understand that in my hut I am surrounded by lots of men in the dark. I'm not normally spooked but it doesn't sit that well with me!!!

Were my head less headache I would love to explain some of the situations more, but I shall try and sleep (with spider keeping a watchful eye) and hope tomorrow to be able to explain this place to you all because it really is something else!

Night guys

C x
Sent from my iPhone

Day 10

Standing being chatted up by an Ugandan - help! Pretending to be engrossed in sending this. Nabil suggested he would sell me for 20 cows - the guy replied he has 20 and now won't go! It's like that time dad sold me when we were in Bahrain! Argh! Anyhow I can relive this tonight when we get back up to date! Enjoy team! :)

Steps: 745 (darn thing ran out of battery!)

Spiders in my bedroom: 1 same one - think he may have been here before me - he's eyeballing me but I reckon I have the upper hand - I was heard to say "night night mind the bugs don't bite" oh wait. You are the bugs....

Near death road situations: 0 (not much driving today)

Selfies requested today: 0 (losing my touch)

Hours spent today in an area advised against visiting by the home office: 24

Trucks going by with armed men: 2

Mangoes: 1 whole one, got it everywhere, totally worth it

Protein consumed: 0

Bugs (including mosquitoes) that are inside the mosquito net and thus can't get out and can only get my sweet tasty blood: 50+

Bites on legs that have swollen: 8 last count

Nile's: 2

I have to start by describing overnight as I'm currently quite afraid due to last night. So. I'm in a hut. It has a tall roof but the ceiling put in is low. It is a room with just enough space for a bed and then its own bathroom. Complete with geckos and spider colonies. The water is "running" water but I would say it's more gentle strolling water over running.... Now you see. I'm in here now and it's warm. It's like 30deg C+ warm. There is no air conditioning (I mean I opened a window which always works in my hilarious old cars) but what I wasn't ready for overnight was that my room with its limited space, occupied with limited headspace, basically becomes nothing short of a sauna. I woke up at 12:30am and was afraid. It was so hot and I was so hot I worried I may actually for real die. It was like being in an oven. It was frightening. I was bathed in sweat (I mean glowing a lot - sorry mum ladies don't sweat) and could not cool my body down. I poured a bottle of drinking water over myself and hoped for the best. I was drenched but I got through the night with little sleep but I mean I didn't die. I kept expecting to hear an alarm to confirm I was fully cooked. So thankfully for worry wart back home types, by the time I have network for sending this it will be over and I will either be served with roasties and a nice gravy, or heading on to Soroti - I'm not sure which. Hopefully the later....

I got up and headed for breakfast. I was somewhat ruffled from the ordeal of the night, but I tried to be cheerful, unfed last night and cooked through the night I felt a bit less friendly than normal, but I got a coffee and two pieces of coconut bread (I just ran with it) and sat blankly hoping my head came round. After my second coffee I perked up enough to function and zone in to the conversation. Nabil and Christopher were talking in earnest about some deeply disinteresting slightly overly academic thing, Jane had gone to get her porridge oats (she brings with - wise - mental note to self - that's a thing to do if I ever come back) and Umar was off bird watching so I checked the itinerary on my phone (which is a glorified camera at the moment due to no other useful function, but hey). We were due to be meeting some farmers about silos. Sounded lit....

We eventually piled into Derek and off out on the open road we headed. Tomorrow we are due to go past Mbale again and Nabil suggested we could maybe go there today and stay the night there. I was a HUGE fan of this idea. Alas it didn't come to pass as you can tell from my nervous ramblings from the raging inferno room.

So we went to pick up Timateo (I just couldn't stop thinking about hair products) and Mike (young rather cool handsome chap who was surprisingly quiet the whole time). We grabbed them from the centre which doubles as a vet surgery (there were lots of cows being sprayed with something as we arrived). As always seems to happen here we were joined by random people wanting to know what we were up to and with nothing better to do.

The first silos were walkable distance so we plodded off, timateo (great hair) and Mike in front (Mike wasn't trying to get subtle accidental selfies with us - think we may have lost our touch) and then Jane and I wandering round and Nabil and Christopher then a child on a bike, an old lady with a rather torn dress on, about 13 children in differing states of clothedness and a couple of goats. It seems to be the norm here when walking somewhere that we just get followed by everyone. When in Rome and all that!!

The first person had two mega silos and so began the great silo visits of 2023. I obviously felt like I had to look extra interested and felt under pressure to react correctly to everything with the sea of faces watching us (probably not speaking English so I felt obliged to have the right facial expressions too) my

concentration level was huge as I tried to respond correctly to the information for the audience to then perceive my response. Take this small scene for example:

“We find the silos overall very good”

slight smile - don't overdo it - and slightly furrowed brow in concern at the word overall suggesting there may be issues

“There is however a small problem with them”

horror tinged with a small amount of concern, yet an element of belief they are about to offer up a solution - all done while nodding

“It is very difficult to close the bases of them and takes two strong men to close them”

despondency yet maintaining that small element of hope

“But when the silos have a delivery system like this” (gestures) “then it is easy to shut and it works well”

utter relief while taking a photo of both delivery systems and nodding with approval at the solution offered

(See how hard it was - remind me not to get famous and have people watching my every move, I don't think I would take it well at all!)

Overall I still think Foag business belongs with Foag so I won't explain much more about our silo trips but the stories from the outside of them that occurred.

We moved on to another farm eventually and the boy on the bike clearly was unaware he was supposed to remain behind us and kept cycling between us all and doing dramatic (hopefully intentional) skids on the road. Between concentrating on not falling over the perilous road with different levels, cycle boy and the entourage behind us (we had by now picked up another old lady walking with a stick, about 20 more children and a few cows and a cockerel) it was quite the walk.

We eventually got to one farm where a large cow was lying down looking a bit rubbish. Sunken eyes were nothing on this poor sod - its eyes were shipwrecked (maybe that is one of my play on words that goes too far, but I'm going to allow it). It was desperately thin, drooling, rolling its eyes and looked not ok at all. Everyone was markedly ignoring it. I wanted to run to it and give it water as its eyes looked so bad and it was clearly suffering in the hot midday sun, but I was gently guided to look at silos. I kept looking over to it. It got gradually worse and then lay its head down, quietly let out a sigh and left this mortal world. Still no one paid it the slightest bit of attention. Everyone was looking at silos and pointing and taking notes. I was a bit sad that I had just watched such a beautiful beast expire but I guess that's just the way it is here. As we left Patrick said “ay your cow died uh?”

And the woman responded with “yes I have many others” so... there we are. This woman did not get my approval for this reason but her silos looked ok.

Quite distressingly if I take snippets of information out of chronological order for a moment, Umar confirmed that they would more than likely eat and sell the poor sod (good luck finding any meat on it) now it was dead (yum?!) and then on a different note someone pointed out that the cow had most likely died of Foot and Mouth - which brought back some pretty horrible memories of many years ago and pyres and burning cows. NONE of my clothes worn here can go near outside until they have been thoroughly washed. (Funny how the visit to the hospital and the complete lack of bio security which made me realise anything they were there for I could catch worried me less than foot and mouth - you can take the girl out of the countryside but you can't take the countryside out of the girl).

So leaving behind that farm and that woman we moved to another silo, one near the road. It was right next to a milling operation - run by a small generator running on diesel. It was a bit loud so after we had seen the silos and as Christopher was jotting down notes and all excited about valves and oxygen levels Nabil walked off and started giving small children sweets. It was surprising how quickly it descended into chaos. One minute a cute child is eating a lolly, the next Nabil and I are surrounded by people begging for money reaching out with arms like some kind of terrible zombie movie from my nightmares.....! It totally unnerved me and I shot into Derek all upset as they all looked into the car begging and trying to look the most pathetic.

We visited a few more silos (so many silos!) and still Christopher was note taking furiously and gesticulating and like a small child in a frenzied excitement. It was kinda nice to see someone so enthusiastic and interested in something. He came past me eyes bright after seeing one silo with the comment "we're learning so much, so much" and then powered off to see the next.

I'm sorry I slightly switched off as I was hungry, tired, dehydrated and just a little bit over everyone wanting money from us so possibly I didn't pay quite the attention to it all as I may have, but it seems like the nozzles need amending and everyone in the whole of Uganda wants one. As long as we fund some of it.....

So silo examinations over "Wasn't that an amazing day?"

"Yes, Christopher - they love their silos huh?"

no response as Christopher is looking out to middle distance with a smile and clearly a happy internal dialogue going on

We came back to here. It really is something else. It has to be seen to be believed. I don't believe my level of English or indeed explanation skills could cover this place. We sat over by a pile of peanut husks and had a chat (while the hostess killed a chicken - so glad I wondered what was going on in the distance at the particular moment - how many things did I have to watch die today?!). My chat was a bit bleak again today as I realised that yet again everyone here seems to want saving (as well they might) but they don't seem to have the drive and determination to actually do it. It seems like everything we do seems to be taken and then they tell us sad tales and just want more. I wonder if I'm just all sad storied out and just can't really take any more. The poverty is absolutely ridiculous and my hearts absolutely go out to each and every one of these guys, but also, I work hard (well ok I think I work hard) to earn money, I try and make sure that I do my best, I'm rarely found sitting down before about 8pm, I haven't watched tv (plane excepted) for months. You can't just wait for life to save you, you need to have the drive and determination to go out and save yourself.

I'm seeing a lot of apathy. Don't for one second think that I am unaware of how lucky I am by birth, I do so very much for charities as I wish to give back and thank my lucky stars every day. But I wouldn't let disaster just gently walk up to me and shove me over. I would fight it every step of the way and go down fighting. These guys out here need to have a bit of fight and then use the helping hand we offer to give them the advantage, but that just doesn't seem to be the way they feel out here.

I think that the cooperatives we have seen seem awesome and I love what they are doing, but the individual people we have helped I'm slightly less sure on. I feel like the issues that are really needed sorting out here all stem from contraceptives - there are just too many children. All adorable wonderful little things, but parents can't afford them, can't feed them, can't school them and thus they need help. But they have 11 or so children. If they had less children these problems would be so much less. But how does one even begin to deal with such a huge issue?

Everything stems from the population growing exponentially, food production being poor from drought and there is neither the money nor the food to support it. This place is an absolute timebomb waiting to go off. Starvation is about to be a massive problem here. On a huge level. Less crops more people. This is a disaster waiting to happen. But how on earth does one person, one small charity or even one group of

people combat that. One step at a time everyone keeps saying to me. But a step in what direction? Who do we help and what do we hope to achieve by doing it?

I think the silos are awesome and clearly make a better storage solution for farmers - allowing them to sell their crops when prices are high and stopping them being damaged. This is a step in the right direction. But this country needs so very much help, and so darn fast! And if you gave me £24 million to spend helping out here I still wouldn't know what to do. How on earth do you solve these problems? On an individual level? National level? Community level? How....? And what do you actually do?

I have much to think about. I hope I can sleep, but if I can't then I shall cook quietly and think on this more. *pensieve expression just in case the entourage are watching* I feel like there must be something useful and productive we can do. But what... what escapes me....

Sleep well team

C x

Sent from my iPhone

Day 11

Such sketchy Wi-Fi!

C x

Steps:18931 (yet I was sat in the car almost the whole day - hmmm)

Times I comment "gosh that was a bold piece of driving": 1

Times it was actually not a bold piece of driving but a kamikaze move which nearly resulted in all our deaths: 1

Near death road experiences: roughly 20 (good for the length of drive)

Times I had a Rolex: 1 (no - it's not that)

Times I saw someone getting red diesel from a petrol station in a small plastic bag: 1 (I kinda think that's one more than is ideal)

Times I had working Wi-Fi in the past 3 days that wasn't Nabil's hotspot: 0

Nile beers: 2

I woke at 4am. In fairness I was much cooler. Covered in mosquito bites, but much cooler. I lay awake thinking of exams for the children, what I could do if I had unlimited funds here, what I was going to eat when I got back (protein oh dear god protein) and other such loops that your mind gets stuck on when you are awake too early. Eventually I just got up and had a shower. Yes I had a shower (much to my surprise) no it was in no way heated or more than a trickle. Anyone that says a cold shower is "invigorating" is lying to you. It's horrible, miserable and devigorating if you ask me but there we are.

Eventually I went down from the shed or whatever you called my room to have breakfast expecting another selection of food that would make me ill. Nabil said "hey C sit down have a Rolex" "to be honest Nabil I just want something to eat" I was so tired, hungry and just over not being able to eat anything that I was a wee bit narkier than my normal shiny happy self... (anyone that knows me well - shhhh some people may not realise what a grumpy person I am) how we laughed as I realised that a Rolex was actually a chapatti with an omelette inside. My excitement was immense. Food. Containing protein... here.... Now?!

I wolfed it down with great joy and smacking my lips with joy. I almost didn't make a coffee I was so excited. Nabil has just pointed out to me that it was street food and bought from Namalu which is possibly worse than anything we have been faced with this far. But I didn't care then and I don't care now. If I have another similar... ahhh... "situation" to what has befallen me recently then I shall just accept that and move on (slowly with my legs crossed)... gosh it tasted so good after rice and fruit for the past week. Real food. Proper like calories and protein. I nearly cried I was so delighted!!

We packed our stuff together, said goodbye to the owner and headed off to see his father (Zachariah) to show our respects before we left Namalu and headed to meet Cornelia near Soroti. Zachariah is a mature chap - the village elder if you will. He really does need to retire and enjoy the good things in life and just

have a peaceful time. He refuses and worries about his community and how he can best serve them, refusing to let go of things until he has found a replacement. I told him he reminded me of my father. He smiled broadly. I have dad number 2 in Namulu now...

We left him (with some fresh mangoes just picked off his tree - honestly tasting is believing with the fruit here and one can't understand how amazing they actually are!). We started the long (and fairly uneventful) drive to Mbale and then Soroti via Cornelia and Kumi hospital....

We were due to meet Cornelia in her home village (sorry the name escapes me) and we drove past an empty looking building and Umar got all upset and said "she is not there!" And off we drove again. We rang her - she had been there - she was getting chairs for us to sit on (outside the front of a locked and chained up store). So we greeted her, both her sons, a few random people and of course the man selling bananas on the street that has joined the entourage as is the way. Quite interestingly we only picked up a few rabbits this time to the group no cows or goats. Nabil then hilariously asked one of the nice looking young sons if he would have me - the dowry would have to be 20 cows. "Yes we have 90 cows that would be no problem..." said the one son sticking his hand out to shake.

I managed to come out with an "errrr" while there was clearly a pause in Nabil's thinking. I have been whining all this time about no man in my life - just one handshake and my dad gets 20 cows and I get a man. Thankfully I think Nabil cotted on to the fact that maybe I wanted a bit of choice in the matter (sorry dad I suspect 20 cows would have provided well for you - and no more me to worry about!). The guy also realised this and spent the rest of our time there trying to impress me with his charm and looks. I mean he was a pretty good looking chap - sort of built like a rugby player. He asked for my WhatsApp (and of course a selfie) which I slightly dubiously gave him (it's quite the done thing here to dole out your number - I have had SO MANY messages from Ugandans - not asking for anything mostly just "wishing me a blessed day".... As I write this particular paragraph, the guy above has sent me "good morning how are you beautiful? I hope god kept your people safe." I mean - dad have you anywhere to store 20 cows.?!?! 😊

Once we left them behind we headed on to Kumi hospital. This has been something I have followed on foags journey as it has had some big funding from us. The previous hospital we visited made me sad as it was so, poor, run on a shoestring and not quite where I would want to be treated. I was worried about this one - Foag have been involved out here for so long with Kumi. I really hoped it would be something good.

We arrived at freshly painted buildings with a large reception with a receptionist that took care details. This was MUCH more like it. Lots of chat - within which I asked about family planning. It seems to me that the children are the problem - too many. The guy suggested that the men don't want... ahh... dr-ing... meaning the women need to be the ones not having children. We discussed a few things and he is sending me details of how we could maybe start a project going out into the community and doing implants for the ladies (which last about 5 years) to stop them having so many children (obviously their choice and explained what it means) - in my mind that has been searching for so many different things, this is where I think I want to help most - less children means more food for everyone - the ones they have are the cutest little things, but... let's face it - the average amount of children here is apparently 6.7 - umm..... I gave him my details to look into costs per implant per person, outreach programs etc. I want to help with the student side here too - but in my logical "what's the best way" sort of mindset I think that if the number of children per family can be brought down, everything will be better from there - more food to go round, less school fees to find, less children with parents unable to fund fees, less children turning to crime due to hunger and so on. Yes. I felt I had found something maybe I can do to help here after much thinking.

We then went and looked round the hospital - checked out the generator that Foag supplied (how's this - it has 2 men whose soul job is to keep it clean and maintain it - call in the service people and fuel it up - that's it - their job) it looked like a show piece of equipment - well looked after - and well used. Good stuff Foag good stuff.

We looked at the rest of the hospital - x ray machines, maternity wards, surgeries with air conditioned theatres - yes! He also agreed that when work is being done as a charity he knocks the prices down (jolly nearly asked him to look at my back and associated issues - was looking at about £80 all in!). So charitable, fixing children with disabilities, and a professional looking outfit. Hurrah - something I can really celebrate in my mind as a success!!

We headed to Soroti hotel where I am now (no Wi-Fi to speak of, slightly dodgy electrics with cables and ends hanging out, suspicious brown stains on the walls of my bathroom and a shower that is at best a dribble. BUT.... My bed is gorgeous and the room is air conditioned. That will do! Remind my not to get tanked up on Niles and then wonder what happens if I touch the pretty copper wire.....

We bought some pineapples (Nabil listened to my whining about wanting pineapples and stopped Umar by a trader) and along with the oranges (green - weird) and mangoes (from Zachariah) we asked the kitchens to cut them up and supply us with a fruit platter. It was awesome. I sat eating pineapple on a lovely balcony type thing. I felt slightly bad as behind us was the water source where families were pumping water out for themselves and I was drinking Nile beers and chomping on pineapple. I would not blame them for thinking what a twit I was for sitting filling my fat face, drinking beer while they got water to carry back to their homes. But I mean - what could I do. I sat with my back to them as I felt at least then I wasn't rubbing their noses in it. Inequality is vast here - it made for a slightly uncomfortable few hours for me as I ate and drank while they watched on.

Other than the slightly worrying moment above, today has restored my faith, as those of you that know me well would have seen, my spirits were falling and falling as I saw disaster unfolding in slow motion and nothing I can do and the people we met not wanting to fight it. Today has shown me people that are willing to fight (good looking Gerald and his family to try and better their lives) and a professional outfit in Kumi hospital that realises its role in charity. That and the fact that I may be able to put together a small program to look at family planning which my mind is getting set on as the biggest answer. I feel so much better. It feels out here like using a thimble to put out a forest fire. Maybe I can think it through and create a bucket at least...

As I seem to be so into quoting my favourite songs, here's one for you for today: Something good comes with the bad, the songs never just sad. There's hope, there's a silver lining.
I found my silver lining out here.

C x

Sent from my iPhone

Rest of Days

Steps:?

Times nearly died on the road: 100+

Times we killed a dog on the road: 1

Miles travelled since I last wrote: seems like millions - probably 4-500.

Nile beers: 8/9 (over three days)

Pounds per night the last hotel was (including meals and beer): £25ish

Jobs I really wanted that I didn't get: 1

Mangoes and pineapples eaten: countless

Imodium: 2 (not bad over 3 days)

Likelihood of me getting through check in with my bag as heavy as it is currently: 0

I don't really know where to start. I didn't write a journal on Friday night because I had been got too drunk by two nuns. I do believe that may well be a story in itself but there's a first time for everything! If you are going to be led astray - then best have it done by nuns huh?! If you want to know what state I was in, I headed up to bed after some whiskey (Nabil and Christopher were having some and I was thirsty!!) snorting and chuckling as I went - every so often while we were quaffing Nile beer and whiskey at the hotel Nabil had to tell me to be quiet as I was getting too rowdy. I maintain that if I was got drunk by nuns then I can do as I please!

Yesterday was a very long day. We spent it all travelling to Lira which is up north (I am currently on a 9 hour journey to the airport so that's fun). We had two sisters in the car with us. The two that had led me astray the day before. I believe they too may have had sore heads. Hahahaha. What a wonderful place this is!

The drive was long and we went past lots of markets and gatherings - I guess it was Saturday so the day to get stuff done. When we got to Lira we sort of stopped half way up a mud track where some ladies were sitting in the shade of a tree. This was to be our destination. I was unsure about the whole thing - driving for 2.5 hours to see some ladies down a mud track under a tree - I'm pretty sure we could have managed that closer to Soroti! We actually were there to look at a plot of land - which we did (fascinating) and then we walked off to the next. We walked quite a lot and in the blazing sun it was pretty relentless. I'm all for a nice walk, but didn't enjoy it in the blazing sun through scorched fields, but there we are.

On our way round we saw some really cool gin making. I mean they say gin. You decide. Juniper berries were not included in the recipe anywhere!!!

So what they did was... they took molasses from near by sugar plantations. They put yeast and water in and it all too willingly started to ferment in the hot African sun. They left it to ferment (in rank old barrels) for 4-5 days. They then transferred it to metal barrels. And this is where I have taken a video for the children because it is science in action! They heat the bottom of the barrel. The barrel is sealed except for a small tube at the top. This tube leads into a vat of water. The vat of water cools the gaseous alcohol and it condenses back and is dripped into a Jerrycan.... Alcohol level - we don't know, safe - no idea. But a good use of science and a nice pause on our 25 mile hike (well it felt like it).

We eventually finished looking at plots of land (that were actually the best we had seen) and then went to look at the children's home. The children wished to welcome us through song. The song was.... Long.... They each introduced themselves and where they were from as new verses. There were 20ish of them. By the end of it my smile had turned into a fixed grin - I think the wind had changed and I was stuck like it. Still smiling blankly now...!! 😊

We were given some cake, shown round the home a bit and then all the farmers had gathered to talk about their farms. As is always the case, they needed to give speeches. God had sent us. First white people in the village. Honoured we are there. Travelled so far. Times are hard. No money. Irrigation needed. Always the same. But it literally takes about 3 hours. And it was the 4th meeting like it we had had. I did enjoy the one comment made "we hope one day to be as prosperous as you our dear visitors and maybe even as fat" well. Thanks.

They then gave us figures (meetings that could have been a spreadsheet!) - which went on forever... allow me to give you a flavour. "In season B 2021, soya yields, 2546kg expected was 3452kg, of this we bulked 1893kg. The price per kilo was 2000 shillings, however the insurance claim was...." I mean, guys, just pop it in a spreadsheet and send it to us!! Nonetheless we sat (me with my fixed grin) and listened politely. Just as we thought we could close the meeting, they then all wanted to thank us individually. Absolutely lovely but Umar can't be on the roads after 6pm and the drive was 2 hours + and it was 3:45pm.... Every single person had to say how they personally had gained and thank us profusely and requested us to pass the thanks on to all the charities donators and and and.... it was 4:15. I was a wee bit tired, had mild sunstroke and just wanted to go home. The sisters then said we had to have a meal. At this Umar started to kick off. He would already be late and risk losing his licence. The sister insisted. I said we should go. No one wanted to be rude (except me - I just think I have no class!) so we had a meal there. I was no longer willing to eat food prepared in home kitchens as every single time I get very ill- I think it's the water. I tried hard to be very polite and think I got away with it. Emily the chef has my mobile number and is sending me the cake recipe so I think she's still speaking.

Eventually a very angry Umar managed to get us all together and in the car. The sisters were last - chuckling and without a care in the world. Much to Umar's even further rage. It was 4:45. For the 2 hour drive.

On the drive I checked my emails and got some disappointing news from home about a job I had gone for. I'm already feeling a bit sensitive and broken in my mind, but we can't always get what we want. Maybe my life is due to take a different direction. I can't be all things to all men, maybe instead I should concentrate on my life outside work more. Much to think about.

As I was working through these things Nabil suddenly sat bolt upright and sort of went "ahhhh ARGH!" A dog had run out in front of the car. We had nearly missed it. But alas. No. One less dog on this planet. The weather got progressively worse and we were driving at 6:30pm in a thunder storm! Poor Umar. Poor dog. Poor everything.

We eventually got back and had a few Niles. There was a particularly touching moment when I was a bit upset about everything and Christopher reached forward and just held my hand for a second. This was the most astonishing display of care and affection from him. It meant more to me than any amount of hugs from most others. I knew in that moment that he felt my pain, and didn't like I was sad. And he cared. It was almost an "unbritish" moment from him. But I was hugely touched. When the rest of them turned up we drank Nile and the moment was forgotten. But I knew he cared. And it was what I needed. And I see Christopher as a friend. And my dad number 3 (remembering Zachariah in Namulu).

You come to now. The end of the journey. As I sit here in Derek the cut and shut for the last time. Heading towards Entebbe and the airport and home. The sun is shining. We are all a bit tired. I have 3 pumpkins at

my feet (Patrick's - he was v excited) and Arnold (no idea who he is but Jane seems to like him) catching a lift with us and he's next to me. I think that the memories of this trip will slowly fade, but I'm not sure the impact of it ever will. People were getting terribly worked up about money - often people were presenting huge long presentations to us, requesting money that would change their/their school/their hospital/their child's life forever. And we looked at the request and it was about £25. That's the bar bill Ange and I always manage to total up on a Sunday after a few pints. I could buy some land (enough to sustain a family) here for about £500. But in among all the poverty and worry, there is such joy, such unbridled happiness. There is a freedom that you cannot get back home with our jobs and constant conveyor belt lives taking us from birth to death. I fully intend to come back one day, see everyone again and hopefully see how our efforts have helped them further. I have every intention of being more active in my work for Foag, more proactive in the help I offer.

I shall finish with yet another song quote as seems to be my way.

"It's just the beginning, it's not the end. Things will never be the same again."

See you all soon.

Hopefully!

C x

Sent from my iPhone