

8086 miles (13014 kilometers) away
Amy Hepner

A dynamic system is a set of related phenomena that change in time in a deterministic way. By deterministic we mean that the future of the system is completely determined by the past— (122)

Each millisecond of life leads to the next. Each choice in every short burst of time could lead to success: victory...or failure: breakdown. Each movement [one step left] might mean life (intrigue) or death (loathing).

I was 17 years old when I made my journey halfway across the world. When I stepped off the plane I could not keep my eyes from tears because of the mystic ethos of this place: Malawi...the warm heart of Africa.

The process of getting there was long (40 hours) and planning (7 months), longer. More than this was my reluctance—why did fear shadow interest?—I almost didn't attempt to go. The day, a Sunday, I walked to the limit, and past it. It could have been the words my sister said to me as I sat in the dining room, it might have been that I was well rested from the night before, or my feeling of disgust at the present situation [the result of many things]. Actually, I think it was pressure from a friend to do it. I honestly didn't believe that I would get chosen for this adventure (it was two days past the deadline plus already competitive) and filled out the application half-heartedly only to appease her.

Thus it provides a crude mathematical model for what we observe all around us: no rapidly expanding process grows without limit— (161)

To my surprise, I was accepted.

I could have gotten sick: hasty Malaria leading to long days in someone else's bed or traveler's sickness accomplishing the same. The plane could have crashed, I might have missed the flight (got left in Georgia), lured away by some strange man holding out lollipops, but I safely avoided these.

When we got there I was randomly assigned a bus, number 1 or 2. Arbitrarily assigned a guide. The sun shone more brightly than I had ever seen it before, the mountainous backdrop was breathtaking, the red dust in the air binding. This was the scene: meeting Winston.

As we will see, the chaos of this system (almost paradoxically) is filled with order— (161)

Now for a moment, let's speak of the culture of Malawi. The people are very formal.

("Hello, my name is Winston Fatsani. I give you greetings from the people of the city of Blantyre, from the members of the Partnership committee and from my own family.")

"Hello, my name is Amy Hepner. I share greetings with you from the United States, the city of Pittsburgh and the members of the Partnership there. Also, from my parents and my sisters, who wish to meet you some day.")

Malawians believe in true interaction. They, in general, have the keen ability to understand not only what you are saying with your mouth, but with your whole body. They do not leave each other stuck in the mud (literally it is possible) and are true to their word. They give to those they love, those they do not love, and those they do not know

with an unmatched generosity. It is culturally acceptable to hold hands just as friends, and often you see two people walking shoulder-to-shoulder down the path, conversing, each actually interested in what the other is saying.

Surprises in the Dynamics of the Logistic Map... Universality— (169, 176)

I didn't expect Winston to take my hand. Then again, I didn't expect to fall in love when I went to Malawi. It was something more than the normal hand holding, his fingers were different (locked solid) pulling me close so we could talk personally. Walking there in the dirt, so far from home and yet so close, neither of us had any idea how similar we were: each singers, dancers, poets, spiritualists, naturalists, helpers, lovers. Two people living similar day to day lives in totally different places, each past moment making us the complementary people we were becoming without our knowledge.

Our favorite activity was hiking on Mt. Mulanje and swimming in its natural lakes. We worked together in his garden and shared many meals and afternoon teas. Winston would teach me his language and we would laugh at my pronunciation. (Wa chena kokungola: You are looking good!) We spent too short an amount of time together.

Photos, Pictures, Snaps. What a sad consolation prize of authentic life. When I look at them I see a never ending amount of dynamics. An unspoken word axis, a feeling axis, a shared moments axis, an intensity axis and yet they can never fully show the reality of a situation: too much in the past.

[My memories are too fresh to go, but I have just developed my photos. I cannot believe that you are not here in Malawi any longer. Promise me you will come back. Oh no! words cannot express my joy when we were together. Love, Winston 14.7.05]

A pestering friend, the application, the smooth way there, the bus, the atmosphere, the dirt, the shine, our past, my Winston. It all adds up to something, it adds up to distance [$\sqrt{(X2-X1)^2} + \sqrt{(Y2-Y1)^2}$].

If conditions are a little different, the churning can destroy these patterns— (146)

Thrm: It's crazy (misala), the way one negligent choice can change the track of a life.

Proof: I mean had I decided not to fill in the application time would not have stopped.

I wouldn't still be sitting there at the table suspended.

Life doesn't give you choice a. or b., it gives you freedom (ufulu).

I might have slept in that Sunday, had a relaxing evening watching Sex and the City [I may have even had a second cup of coffee]. If this were the case, I would not be who I am today. I would not have learned to feel the rhythm of unfathomable truth and would be continually choosing a path that is safe and unfulfilling. My eyes would still be shut to the wonderful joy and terrible pain of a first love.

Then again, I wouldn't have to weigh the worth of one man against my entire life.

Quotes taken from:

Peak, David, and Michael Frame. Chaos Under Control: The Art of Science and Complexity. New York: WH Freeman and Company, 1994.