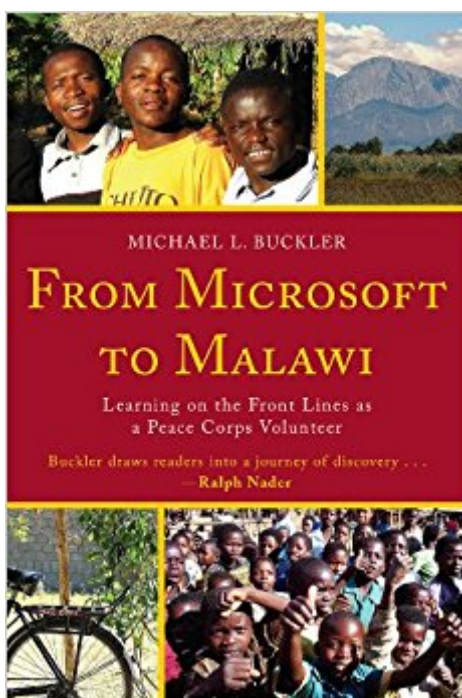


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# From Microsoft To Malawi: Learning On The Front Lines As A Peace Corps Volunteer



## Synopsis

In this compelling narrative, Michael L. Buckler draws readers into the challenging, yet rewarding world of the Peace Corps. Inspired by his journals, the book recounts his life as a Peace Corps teacher after a heartbreaking divorce and a demanding legal career prompted him to make a change. Assigned to a village school in Malawi, Buckler opens his tiny home to three boys, embarking with them on a journey of cross-cultural discovery, personal sacrifice, and transformative growth. Determined to help his village, Buckler collaborates with community leaders to build a boarding school for girls. As momentum builds, a powerful bureaucrat tries to shut down the project and Buckler becomes discouraged. As he agonizes over whether to leave, the village takes matters into its own hands in a moving display of the persistent, courageous spirit of Malawi.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Holy crap. We won't know the real deal until we step off the plane," said Buckler to his fellow Peace Corps volunteers before embarking into the great beyond in Africa. Nine thousand miles and one year later, the 32-year-old lawyer began to understand the depth of commitment demanded by his mission in Malawi and the truth of his initial assessment. Teaching in a village there for two years meant sharing his small home with three boy students as he learned the language (Chichewa), customs, and culture. Buckler's multicultural and transformative personal growth will keep readers' attention as he reports on how he learned the nuanced meanings of commitment, collaboration, and friendship in this exploration of self and place developed from journal entries. Buckler describes with keen powers of observation details of

village life that capture the imagination as he sees beyond those boundaries to the larger global landscape. Readers interested in global community development and armchair travelers will applaud. --Whitney Scott

Modest without being demure, candid without being coy, Buckler draws readers into a journey of discovery, a commitment of soul, body, and mind to his task of helpfulness. He conveys a unique eye for descriptive detail that also scans the bigger picture of the peoples' plight and awareness of the world around them . . . This book should be read by anyone interested in community development within cultural contexts in Africa, or anyone who just wants to be absorbed without pause in a good read. (Ralph Nader, consumer advocate, lawyer, and author) For anyone interested in current African affairs, this is the book for you. Another valuable addition to Peace Corps Experience literature, it was written and published only two years after the author hugged his African family and returned. Not a timid soul, Michael L. Buckler describes his home in Malawi, and explores several controversial topics such as the overlap of services offered by the Peace Corps and non-governmental agencies, the U.S. foreign aid package, American subsidies and their effect upon other nations, Volunteer use of anti-depressants and Volunteer sexual debauchery.... Don't hesitate to buy this book! (Peace Corps Worldwide) From Microsoft highlights the 'interconnectedness' of humanity, the importance of cultural awareness and need for education. Buckler, like many Peace Corps volunteers, wore many hats that exposed him to the complexity of development. From garden and tree-planting projects, to building a girls boarding house, he learned enduring lessons about development work and policy. (Duke Today) 'Holy crap. We won't know the real deal until we step off the plane,' said Buckler to his fellow Peace Corps volunteers before 'embarking into the great beyond' in Africa. Nine thousand miles and one year later, the 32-year-old lawyer begins to understand the depth of commitment demanded by his mission in Malawi and the truth of his initial assessment. Teaching in a village there for two years meant sharing his small home with three boy students as he learned language (Chichewa), customs, and culture. Buckler's multicultural and transformative personal growth will keep readers' attention as he reports on how he learned the nuanced meanings of commitment, collaboration, and friendship in this exploration of self and place developed from journal entries. Buckler describes with keen powers of observation details of village life that capture the imagination as he sees beyond those boundaries to the larger global landscape. Readers interested in global community development and armchair travelers will applaud. (Booklist) Written like a journal, this fish-out-of-water memoir is clearly heartfelt. Buckler left a law career to take a two-year Peace Corps assignment in a village school in Malawi. He here

chronicles his arrival and subsequent adjustment to life in rural Africa. He was supported through the difficult transition and mentored in work and in life by the school headmaster—his relationship is a particularly touching piece of the story. Buckler, in turn, served as mentor (and housemate) to three local boys who would become the first in the village to pass the college entrance exam. He was motivated to write this book in hopes of providing a college fund from the proceeds for the boys he refers to as his sons. Verdict Inspiring and heartbreaking, Buckler's account of the endless obstacles encountered by his students and colleagues and their hope and persistence to succeed makes for compelling reading. Recommended for anyone contemplating volunteer work in the developing world and for those who enjoy chronicles of self-discovery and renewal through sacrifice. (Library Journal) In Malawi, 'nothing is certain except for dusk, dawn and diarrhea,' says Buckler, a Peace Corps volunteer from 2006 to 2008. A lifelong dream, the author was finally spurred to join the organization after defending Microsoft in a multimillion-dollar court case and going through a painful divorce. Cultural differences abound in South Africa, especially in issues of privacy, but even in politics and friendship. Luckily, Mr. Zimbota, headmaster of the school where Buckler teaches, becomes an invaluable cultural ambassador, and three students the author calls 'The Boys' become his housemates, creating a tight-knit family. Aided by naive idealism and the urge to help, Buckler takes on community projects, starting small, with a tree planting plan, and ending with the building of a boarding house for girls who had been travelling up to 10 miles to attend school. Buckler's poetic descriptions provide a colorful image of Malawian life, while never softening the sobering realities of poverty, malaria, and HIV. Buckler succeeds in illustrating how the Peace Corps, though disorganized and underfunded, truly aids communities by providing the basics that westerners take for granted. (Publishers Weekly) Buckler left a successful law career to take a two-year Peace Corps assignment teaching in a village school in Malawi. His compelling journal chronicles the endless obstacles encountered by his students and colleagues, as well as their boundless hope and die-hard determination to succeed. Proceeds from his book are building a college scholarship fund for three of his students. (Savannah Morning News)

Found this book very informative about the culture and people of Malawi. The Peace Corps function was also well explained. Would recommend it for anybody, particularly people who have thought about joining the Peace Corps.

This book helped to capture the difficulties in aid work in underdeveloped African nations. The author shared the joys of his work there. The book is a bit disjointed, but worthwhile read especially

if you are considering overseas mission work.

this book came right on time!! it's an amazing story and I hope to read more of the author's books!

FOR ANYONE INTERESTED IN CURRENT AFRICAN AFFAIRS, this is the book for you. Another valuable addition to Peace Corps Experience literature, it was written and published only two years after the author hugged his African family and returned. Not a timid soul, Michael L. Buckler describes his home in Malawi, and explores several controversial topics such as the overlap of services offered by the Peace Corps and non-governmental agencies, the U.S. foreign aid package, American subsidies and their effect upon other nations, Volunteer use of anti-depressants and Volunteer sexual debauchery. He does something else that reminded me of the infamous postcard incident so long ago. He published a book with an unflattering portrait of a current member of the Malawi Parliament, accusing her of abuse of power. This could have interesting repercussions. Ironically, Buckler joined the Peace Corps after practicing law for a few years. At the age of 32, he was a bit older than the average Volunteer. He describes his difficulty learning a foreign language (Chichewi), adjusting to a new life cooking over an open flame, using an outhouse and riding a bicycle not for leisure but necessity. There were, of course, other nuisances like a black mamba snake and those pesky bats. A teacher assigned to a remote Khawala village (45 miles from Blantyre) usually reserved to punish undisciplined government teachers, he was befriended by the school headmaster who guided him with praise and sage advice ("None of this is your fault . . . You are full of blessings."). Aside from teaching, Buckler coordinated a school campus reforestry program, planting fruit trees, and also began the construction of a girl's dormitory on campus. The latter proved difficult. Mr. Zimbota, the school headmaster, not only mentored the young Peace Corps Volunteer but literally welcomed him into his family ("If you need anything, I live next door."). His own children called Buckler "uncle." A government employee banished to the hinterland years before, he had personally supervised the expansion of a one-room school house to a campus. His wisdom not only guided the author but stimulated him to complete his service. At each stumble, Zimbota was there to lean over and whisper, "Are you ready to begin?" It was a bittersweet relationship. As a consequence to Buckler's success, Zimbota was first demoted, then transferred to another post where he died. Buckler was fortunate enough to create another African family when he invited three male commuter students to share his teacher's house where they not only lived together but he also tutored them. Prior to Buckler's service, no graduate of the Khawala school had ever passed university entrance exams. All three passed. One has aspirations to be a

businessman, another yearns to be a nurse and the third a teacher. All they lack are the funds to continue their education. So, Buckler wrote and published this book. All royalties and reader donations will be used for that purpose. Don't hesitate -- buy this book! This review appeared in Peace Corps Worldwide.

Michael Buckler has written an incredibly honest and thoughtful account of his experiences in Malawi. The book unfolds as a series of rich, vivid, gripping vignettes of the day-to-day struggles of an Peace Corps worker--not some college kid but an older guy with graduate degrees and life experience--together with applications of what we can learn (and must un-learn) about African development from those personal experiences. The complex personal relationships, physical challenges, political issues, and cultural miscommunications all come out in a really engaging manner. The overall effect is revelatory, in that the prospects for international development appear much more complex and fraught than one might have imagined, and yet hopeful as well. Buckler has effectively combined his rich sense for detail with larger themes about caring and community in this valuable book.

Reading this book is the closest you can get to experiencing Malawi without actually being there. Honest, smart, reflective, and at times very funny, Buckler's journey is as much about learning and self-discovery as it is about teaching and lending aid. Weaving a complex tapestry of friendships, culture, customs, history, religious traditions, exploration, adventure, and countless descriptions of both the joys and challenges of life in rural Malawi, this book provides a beautifully nuanced portrait of "the warm heart of Africa."

Mike Buckler has produced a wonderful first novel on his experiences as a peace corps volunteer in africa. he is incredibly frank and honest about what he saw and experienced, and in revealing personal details most others would hide. His self-effacing and straightforward prose is engaging and entertaining. This is a very readable book that i had a hard time putting down

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