

Precious

His name was Precious. Every day that we walked into the children's ward of St. Gabriel's Hospital in Malawi Africa, Precious would follow us from patient to patient with a glowing, larger-than-life smile on his face, like he was part of something really special. The ironic thing about the kids in Africa is that they're always smiling, despite the unforgiving circumstances they are sometimes presented with. Precious's smile was so distracting that you almost didn't notice the shape of his bulging malnourished stomach, or the way he wheezed as he followed us around, or the fact that his parents were nowhere to be seen.



We soon found out that Precious was diagnosed with AIDS and tuberculosis, and that his mother too was sick in the women's ward. Precious was all alone. I found out that in Africa, you have to be more than just a patient. You have to be a friend, and a helper, and a smile, and a fighter, and most of all, you have to be *hope*.

Precious, like most of the people we encountered in rural Africa, was mesmerized by our white skin. He would reach out his little 6-year-old hand to shake mine, and then would pull it away, giggling “*aaaazungu*” the second our hands touched. “Azungu”, in Chichewa, means “white man”. It's almost as if he hoped the white skin had some sort of healing power. What has made this third world believe that the Western hand has more power than their own? They say it is the endless opportunity lingering at our fingertips that gives our hands the power to heal.

I haven't wanted to be a doctor my entire life, but I know now that a place like St. Gabriel's Hospital in Malawi, Africa is where I belong. I know now how fortunate I am to have the opportunity to train my hands to heal, so that I can help those like Precious who will never be presented with that opportunity. When I left Africa after a month of volunteering with my mom, I made a vow to never forget those people, to never forget Precious in all of his suffering. I gave my heart to those like Precious, who are crying out for someone to heal them. When I return to Africa I will be more than just a 17-year-old “azungu”. I will be a doctor, and I will use my hands to heal.