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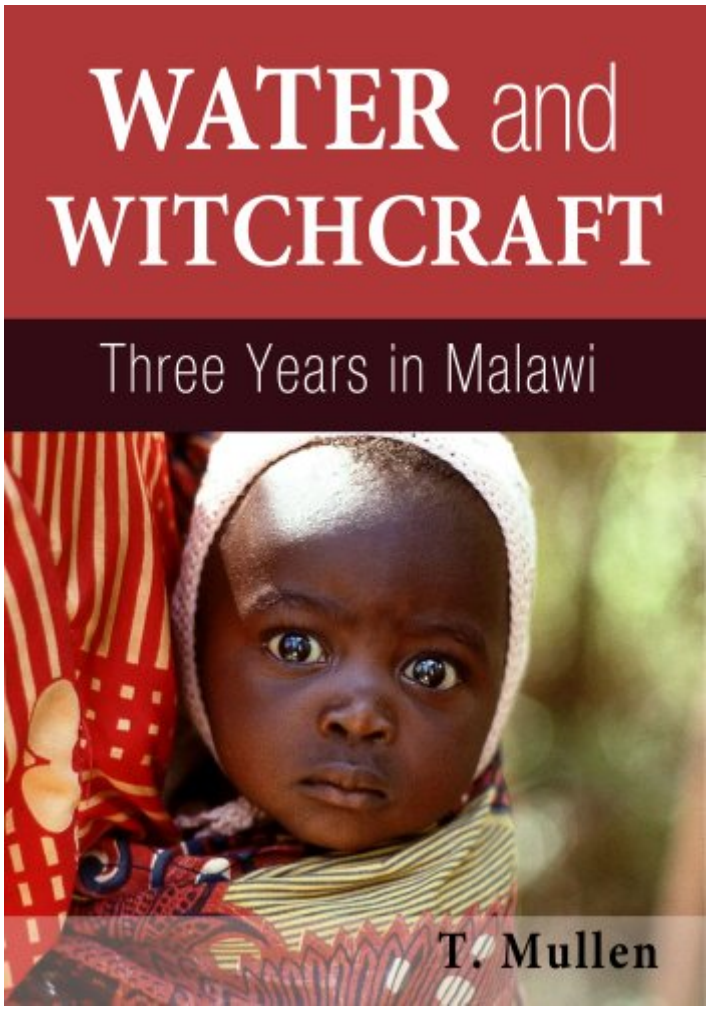
Water And Witchcraft - Three Years In Malawi (African Raindrop Series Book 1)



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Synopsis

Water and Witchcraft recalls the travails and triumphs of providing drinking water to villagers in rural Malawi. In an African land where little goes as planned, gracious locals and quirky foreigners pit their wits against witchcraft, sickness and questionable managers to improve the lives of remote families. The results are rich and unusual. This story recalls the author’s years spent working throughout Malawi. To read more about T. Mullen’s books, click on www.RoundwoodPress.com

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Customer Reviews

This is a great book - I’ve been recommending it to everyone, interested in Africa or not!What a story, and the characters are bigger than life, from Gondwe who excels in the "art of sideline income" to Alabama Dave, to the poignancy of the villagers who were NOT evicted from their homes, to details about how work in Africa works. And how it doesn’t. It mentions the hard parts about living in Africa, without dwelling too long on them. It gives a good, balanced look at living - really living - not only in Malawi - and you can’t help thinking most of us wouldn’t have had Tom’s great attitude and philosophy.I spent 4 years in another part of Africa, and I wish someone had

written a book like this about it. Highly recommended!

Tom Mullins’s acceptance and appreciation of his experience in Malawi touched my heart. I was caught off guard and taken back to my youth living overseas where life was very different from the comfortable life many of us take for granted in the U.S. I actually found myself crying half way through but not from sadness, but because he got ’it’. Definitely a book I will reread and recommend.

I served in the Peace Corps in Malawi. Tom Mullen has done an incredible job of capturing all aspects of that experience; the beauty, the warmth and graciousness of the Malawians, the incredible challenges, frustrations, and spirit of what is was like to live and learn in this beautiful, flawed, and impoverished, place.Tom recounts his experience as a young engineer who has to grapple with some incredibly difficult design issues and fatal flaws of his assigned project. His task is further complicated by the never-ending chaos of materials that are constantly pilfered, plans that seem to mysteriously "go missing", and many co-workers who are ill-prepared at baseline. All of this swirls against a backdrop of one of the warmest, friendliest and most beautiful places on earth for its simplicity and complexity all at once. You are truly taken on the author’s journey.This book is deeply personal to me - Tom Mullen has done a terrific job of describing Malawi and the Malawians so well! It is a very fun read that has me laughing, crying, and reliving my own experience all over again. This book offers a wonderful view into what life is like in the Peace Corps by embracing and interpreting the whole experience. Malawi has sprung to life again for me, and I truly thank him for that!I highly recommend this book!!

Water and Witchcraft as one of Mullen’s first books which therefore might not be very fast paced, but perfectly reflects the atmosphere in Malawi even nowadays. In addition to that the photos included give you an idea how beautiful Malawi is, especially Mount Mulanje, Lake Malawi and Zomba Plateau. Besides great nature the photos also describe typical scenes of local and development work; unfortunately they don’t cover the extremely wild dancing scenes somewhere in the bush bars.The language style changes from funny anecdotes via wisdom for travellers (`Deciding that patience was the best way to deal with uncertainty, I peered out the window. The countryside looked gorgeous, with green grass plains speckled between rock mounds.’) to moving poverty descriptions of refugees from Mozambique, which even made it into US journals (under pseudonym because of Malawi’s strict censorship laws).Mullen gives some insights into the world of

development aid. He can’t hide his admiration for the Danish colleague, who managed to become tax free of his government living overseas plus collecting his Danish unemployment support while traveling to Denmark for sailing his yacht. On the other hand, the damages experienced as water engineer were not 250 pieces, when counting up the missing water pipes, but 25 km of pipeline. He explains why foreign experts are often side-lined, because asking a technical advisor means showing own knowledge gaps, which are perceived as weakness and might be used against one. The whole chapter `development’ is a must read for aid workers, since it describes not only the functioning of the aid business, but also the decadence of aid workers through salaries and separation in a French club atmosphere with pool, drinks and lobsters far away from the local population. The local pace and attitude towards time is summarised with the statement in a waiting situation `Its only a matter of minutes, indeed ninety of them.’ In contrast to that, some expats are characterised with being `So devoted to guilt and work that misery sagged from their jowls’. The focus of superior managers in the development sector during reviews of technical reports seem to focus on checking the acronym list and correct placing of logos according to the company policy. Fashions with new buzzwords in the aid sector result in gender awareness workshops being pushed instead of technical engineering; donor workshops are the only occasion, the author admits, where during his three year stay he has combed his hair.My favourite part is the solution of the secret of the book title, why also Muzungus are using witchcraft. Reflecting on the surrounding behaviour, the author often wonders `Does this path have a heart?’. This book definitely has a heart.Lilongwe, July 2013.

A delightful read! Tom has managed to capture the spirit and culture of this little impoverished nation as it was in the early nineties. Each chapter contains thought provoking insights into what it is like to immersed in a culture where you are a ’volunteer’; little more than a peer of the Malawians who are relentlessly making their way through life, while at the same time dealing with the international aid donors and their western view of what things should be.Giving in doesn’t mean giving up. Tom is a water engineer, given the responsibility of making something work, in an environment where the challenges are not engineering, but rather understanding the culture and environment.I recommend this book as a gift to anyone considering joining the Peace Corps or other international aid organization or for those considering a gap year. Such a journey is not for everyone. This book provides some insight into what life as a volunteer is like in a far off place, in the heart of Africa, called Malawi.

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