

## From Pacifica to Uganda, Nadine Hart builds paths of hope and recovery

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Children in Rakayata Village, Uganda (Courtesy of Nadine Hart)

Editor's note: This is the first of a two-part series.

Nadine Hart was just back in Pacifica for her 30-year Terra Nova High School reunion and had a wonderful time reconnecting with old friends. She also took long walks along familiar favorite places - Linda Mar Beach and Rockaway, and in the hills in the back of the valley. And as she walked she thought of the many here who have inspired her to go out into the world and make something of herself. She especially thought of her parents, long-time Pacificans Diane and Bill Hart, who have always been there, and who have always been involved, and who have made her journeys from Pacifica, to Montana, to Uganda, loaded with love and brimming with help.

Hart graduated from MSU Bozeman with a BS in Microbiology. In 1986, Hart headed off to Jacksonville, Florida for a medical technology internship. In 1991 she received her Masters in Medical Science from Emory University Physician Assistant Program. She spent another year in Florida and headed back to Montana where she has since worked as a PA for the St. Vincent Healthcare (SVH), headquartered in Billings. A physician assistant (PA) is trained under the medical model and is licensed under the Board of Medicine and works under the supervision of a physician. "We can evaluate patients, diagnose and treat patients similar to a physician but have physician backup for questions, consultation, etcetera," Hart said.

At SVH, Hart has

worked as a PA in a variety of capacities including rural health clinic, family practice, geriatric medicine, internal medicine and palliative care. She currently works in the Walk-In Clinic/ED department. When she first returned to Montana from Florida, she worked as the sole provider in a rural health clinic east of Billings. She did a lot of house calls, some as far as 60 miles from the clinic. Her patients affectionately called her Dr. Quinn. From there she headed off to Billings and trained with a geriatrician. She then ran a geriatric clinic.

In 2003, Hart decided it was time to pursue her dream of joining the Peace Corps. She began the Peace Corps process and was told she would be assigned to Uganda. She researched it and absolutely fell in love with the people and the country. But there was a snag. During her medical technology internship in Florida, she had done a lot of work with HIV/AIDS and had set up many TB cultures. She tested positive for TB exposure. While the Peace Corps offer was removed from the table, Hart knew that Uganda was the real message and so with the encouragement of her long-time employer, she took a three-month leave and volunteered with AIDS Orphans Education Trust (AOET). With AOET, Hart lived with a Ugandan family in a village and was assigned to the HIV/AIDS department and was also part of the Village Mobile Clinics outreach team. Nadine recalled her first moments in Uganda as she stepped off her plane into Kampala, the capital city. She brought with her seven tubs of medicines and supplies donated by the Catholic Medical Mission Board and others. She was stopped by customs officials. Despite her license and official documents, customs told her they would hold everything until the inspectors arrived, an event which could take days. "Fine," she said. She would wait. Told a donation might lesson the wait, Hart paid up and immediately took off to meet the Director of AOET with all her medicines and supplies intact, a real feat she was told. But Hart was thrilled to be in Uganda.

"The sights and sounds were so different," Hart said. "In the big city there were no lanes for traffic and cars moved

and pushed every which way. People walked along the sides of the roads with baskets and loads on their heads, babies on their backs and kids walking beside them. Some rode bicycles loaded with food or furniture, even whole mattresses. Horns honked continuously." Out of the city and into the countryside, Hart headed towards Jinja, the town nearest the village where she would live - Bugembe Village. She saw sugar cane farms and banana trees and lush green grasses. A steady stream of people walked along the roadside where there were also boda boda's, bicycle taxis. The temperature was about 80 degrees and a little more humid than Montana. Hart said she felt peaceful, safe and welcome. In her new home, she was greeted with the gift of a bark card, which everyone signed. She also went out immediately on a village outreach mobile clinic.

At that time In Uganda, Hart said the rate of mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS was 15-25 percent. "The rate of AIDS was 60 percent in one village in particular where we did home-based care for HIV/AIDS families. Children were brought to me from all over. But one couple stood out. Raymond's family came to me as he was in the hospital sick with pneumonia and TB. Raymond was born with HIV and was dying of AIDS." Hart provided the family with medications for Raymond and each time she traveled with doctors into Jinja, she would visit Raymond at the hospital after work. "It was the saddest death I had encountered as he suffered and was in pain," Hart said. "I fought for some pain relief for him. (This is a long story.) But they did not have a good system for end of life in children (or anyone). I went to his burial. My heart went out to all of the families and children who died this way, suffering." Hart ended up putting together a document to help families and those living with HIV/AIDS.

During her stay in Uganda, Hart said she had no appetite for food and lost 35 pounds. But while she didn't mind the weight loss, the reason for it was the lack of sanitation infrastructure. "The stench in the village where I stayed was immense," Hart said. "It was rainy season and although I had a bathroom in the house I lived in, the others who lived near did not. It was latrines, not constructed properly and too close together and in the living environment. Rivers of water, red mud and feces, traversed everywhere anyone walked. The smell is unforgettable." Still, Hart said, that did not take away from the wonder of the experience. "In the early morning, the roosters crowed and the birds sang and you could hear the zing of bugs, while you watched the geckos crawl on the walls. You could also hear the singing of prayers." Any traveling on Hart's part was always done in the company of a guide and her guide was often a young man named John. John, along with his older brother Ronnie, was a volunteer at AOET and mentored young Ugandans on HIV/AIDS and STD prevention. He also helped with the mobile clinics and escorted Hart into town to the children's hospital.

When Hart's three-month stay was coming to a close, she talked to John about his own illness. "I knew John had sickle cell disease and I said to him, 'Why don't I take you to the sickle cell center to get you evaluated for treatment?'" And that is when Hart heard about John and Ronnie's younger brother Kenny, and that they would not go to the hospital without Kenny. Orphaned at a young age, Kenny was bedridden from the side effects of sickle cell. His hips were so deteriorated that he had a very hard time walking and could not get his legs up on a bicycle taxi for a ride to town. He had never been seen by a doctor. At the center, Kenny's hips were X-rayed to assess damage. A referral to orthopedics was set for another day and Kenny was sent home with some medicine to build his blood folic acid, Tylenol for pain and malaria prophylaxis. Shortly before her flight was destined to leave, Hart received a call. Kenny had fallen down in the street and was in severe pain. He was having a bone crisis. Hart sent Kenny to a private hospital in Jinja and consulted with the sickle cell doctor in Kampala. There was no pain medicine to be found.

"Kenny suffered and suffered. I could not get his shrieks and cries of pain out of my head. I vowed I would be back for him and told him so." Hart spent the next year supporting Kenny with money for better food, crutches, housing, etc., and he improved. She also spent the year working on paperwork to bring him to the States for medical care. In June of 2004, Kenny arrived in Montana, "A skinny kid on crutches." Next week, part two follows Hart's subsequent trip to Uganda in 2006, the formation of her nonprofit, Hope 2 One Life and the further story of a young man named Kenny.



