

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

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Nadine Hart, Uganda, 2010 (Courtesy of Nadine Hart)



In 2003, Pacifica-raised Nadine Hart returned to her work as a Physician Assistant at St. Vincent Healthcare in Billings, MT, after doing what she had set out to do — working for three months with the AIDS Orphans Educational Trust (AOET) near and in Jinja, a city in southeastern Uganda. On this trip she provided end-of-life care for children dying of AIDS. She also worked with the Village Mobile Clinics, and close to her journey's end, she met a young man, bedridden with deteriorated hips from undiagnosed and untreated sickle cell. When she left Uganda she told Kenny that she would find a way to help.

"In Uganda, I learned a lot about faith, strength and perseverance, and heartache as well," Hart said. "It was hard to leave and I could never forget or stop praying for the kids I met."

Back in Billings, Hart put a picture of Kenny on her picture board in the newly remodeled internal medicine office. Orthopedic surgeon Dr. David Shenton came to an open house and asked about the kid in the photograph — could he be helped with an operation? When he learned, "yes," Dr. Shenton volunteered his services. St. Vincent Healthcare also signed on.

For the next year, Hart sent money to Kenny so he could buy crutches, live in better housing and buy better food. She also spent the year working on his paperwork to bring him to Montana for medical care. Hart said every life is important and if she could only help with one life, then Kenny was where she was starting. In 2004, 21-year-old Kenny came to the States.

"When I met Kenny in Uganda, he was in so much pain I did not even know what it was like for him to smile," Hart recalled.

Kenny, who had arrived shy and withdrawn, had missed most of his education due to his illness. Orphaned at age 12, he lived in Uganda with his brothers in a small brick building with no electricity or water. Sometimes he would be confined to bed for six months after a sickle cell crisis. He spoke only in a whisper when he arrived in the States.

Dr. Shenton brought in his partner, hip specialist Dr. Dean Sulkin for the surgeries, and over time, Kenny received two complete hip replacements. With Hart at the helm, and with help from the Billings community, Kenny was able

to receive private tutoring and attend a year of high school. He obtained his GED in three years. He calls Hart "Mum."

But recovery had its difficulties and after his second surgery, Kenny was in an extraordinary amount of pain.

Hart felt helpless and went to her church seeking guidance. When she arrived, there was a man talking about Far Reaching Ministries and their work with children displaced by the horrific atrocities of Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). And Hart understood that there was a message for her in this man's talk. She was needed back in Uganda.

With support on the home front from her older sister and her parents, Pacificans Diane and Bill Hart, and with the blessings of her employer, Hart took off through her church on a mission to Uganda.

"We went with Far Reaching Ministries to the areas of Northern Uganda in Kitgum affected by the LRA War and in particular taught healthcare, nutrition, hygiene, sanitation and malaria prevention to the caregivers of the orphans," Hart said. "These were infants found in a bush or puddle or without anyone to care for them after their village was attacked by the LRA rebel army and the majority of the villagers were massacred or abducted."

In Kitgum, Hart found 10-year-old Bosco taking care of the orphaned, sick and malnourished baby Nancy. And here Hart is sidetracked, which she often is as she recalls the many Ugandans who have touched her heart.

"Bosco was the only parent Nancy had ever known," Hart said. "And without him, she would have died."

On this visit in 2006, Hart and her team also visited the Family Empowerment Farm located near Masindi.

"This is in the middle of the country and is a safe haven for the refugees," Hart said. "Here we found lots of hope, yet lots of illness and disease. People were drinking from the only water source, muddy pond water, while insects buzzed all around."

At the Empowerment Farm, Hart said people were sick with malaria and diarrhea illnesses as it was the rainy season.

"Malnourished children, who were scabies infested, slept on cold dirt floors in little mud huts with rain leaking through the straw roof thatches. They had no blankets and their clothing was torn."

"Yet these families were grateful for a place to begin over again, free from fear," Hart continued. "Many of the women had lost their husbands, brothers and children to the LRA war and many were abducted themselves and escaped. They brought with them orphans and remaining children. Courage is an understatement."

But with teams only staying for two weeks, and with long lines of hopeful patients standing in the rain for hours to be seen and treated, Hart's group realized that all of the medicine in the world would not help these people. For once the help left, there would still be a lack of clean water, hygiene, sanitation, adequate shelter and nutritious food and everyone would be sick again.

"Here on this farm they had some emotional and spiritual support through the church and a women's empowerment group, but they needed much, much more," Hart said. "However, through it all they were happy and grateful and had big smiles and big hugs and humbleness and humility beyond measure."

Returning to Montana, the team raised \$10,000 for a deep water well that benefited 6,000 lives.

With the start-up support of St. Vincent Healthcare Foundation, in 2007 Hart co-founded Hope 2 One Life, a "faith based, non-profit organization that provides hope, clean water, health care and educational resources for impoverished people."

Hart explained the organization's name.

"The 'One Life' begins with Kenny and the 'hope' to help others like him by the grace of God. H<sub>2</sub>O is the symbol for water, and clean water is the key to survival."

Hart goes to Uganda, four to six weeks a year. She works holidays and weekends and long days at St. Vincent's to accumulate the vacation time needed to make the Uganda journey. She has made it her passion to raise awareness on the fact that throughout the world, nearly one billion people lack access to clean water and because of it, thousands die each day. In Billings she has established World Water Day events and Walk for Water, which have raised enough money to support two projects in Uganda, two in Tanzania and one in Rwanda. And each time Hart goes to Uganda, she is accompanied by a great many volunteers including nurses, nurse practitioners, hydrologists, engineers, electronic specialists and anyone who has "a heart to help."

They bring medical supplies, water supplies, hygiene kits, school supplies, exam tables, books, x-ray equipment and more. (Visit [www.hope2onelife.org](http://www.hope2onelife.org).)

Since Hart's first Uganda trip in 2003, she has seen many things that have made her heart soar, some more personal than others. Kenny, who couldn't read when he arrived, is now majoring in computer science at Rocky Mountain College in Billings and is walking "perfectly!" Home is Nadine's house, and during the school year, Kenny lives in the college dorm.

After traveling to an IDP (internally displaced person) camp in Uganda, Hart was able to locate extended family of the little boy Bosco and the infant girl Nancy who subsequently granted permission for the two children to be adopted by a family in Billings.

"They realized they could not take care of these kids, especially baby Nancy," Hart said.

Hart has also had her share of personal sorrows, including the loss of Lawrence, whom she met in 2003.

"Lawrence was an amazing child with AIDS who came to me at the AOET office," Hart said. "He walked up on his own, starving and very sick and with a hemoglobin of five — encouraging all whom he met."

Hart got Lawrence on an antiretroviral program, but he died when she was back in the States.

The recipient of several altruistic awards as well as several Physician Assistant awards, Hart believes that helping people anywhere who are less fortunate, promotes common awareness and hope, and the spirit of unity and peace for communities and countries all over the world. "We are all human beings," Hart said. "And I have learned through simply loving your neighbors as yourself, whether they are next door or across the world, all things are possible."