

# RESURRECTING HOPE

by Rebecca McCormick

Nurse anesthetist Steve James  
brings life to Kenyan village

Steve James was ready to fly cross country to a family reunion when terrorist attacks paralyzed the nation on Sept. 11, 2001. His wife was already in California. His daughter, Brittney, e-mailed from college in Ashville, N.C. "Isn't this crazy?"

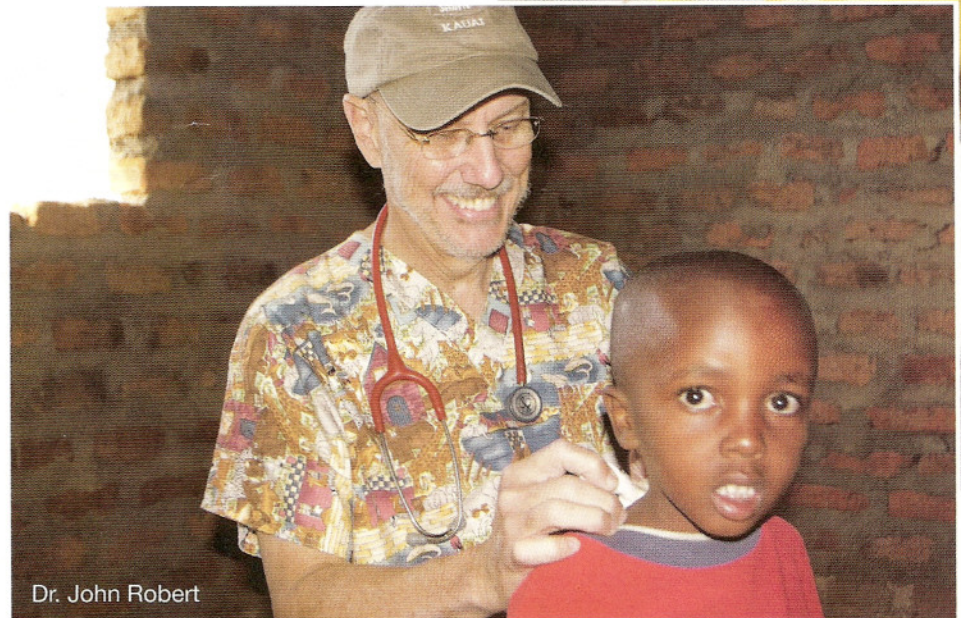
Two days later, Steve drove from Alabama to Atlanta, uncertain when flights would resume. "I figured I could always drive to Ashville and visit Brittney," he explains. "I did get on the first plane to San Francisco, but I was the only passenger."

The next day, Brittney was found dead in her apartment.

"Greta and I were crossing the Golden Gate Bridge when I got a call saying something had happened to one of our children," he recalls. "We were shocked to learn it was Brittney. Everything after that is sort of a blur."

In 1975, James had moved to Arkansas, where he finished nursing school and married Greta, a colleague at Baptist Medical Center. Their son, Mark, was born a year later. Anesthesia school in 1980 prompted a return to Alabama, where Brittney was born. After graduation, the family moved back to Arkansas, where they lived until 1995.

"We planted deep roots at what is now Fellowship North church during our time in North Little Rock," says James. "Brittney developed a strong faith and desire to help others. After we moved to Cullman, Ala., she stayed in touch with her Arkansas friends." One night, 16-year old Brittney was deeply moved while watching a television program produced by Christian Children's Fund. "She told us she wanted to sponsor a child," says James. "She went out and got a part-time job



Dr. John Robert

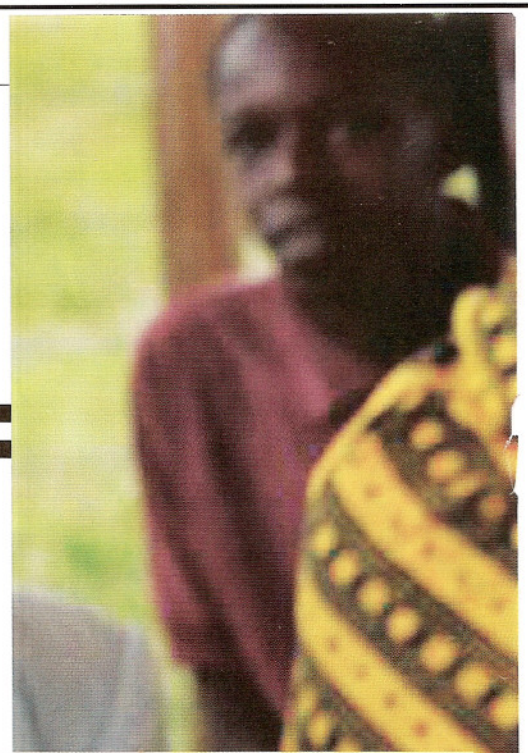
to send \$24 a month to support a Kenyan boy named Newton."

After high school, Brittney asked her dad to take her to Kenya. They went to Europe instead. At Brittney's memorial service, her parents asked friends to supplement the college fund they'd started for Newton. "Deep down, I knew I had to go," says James. In March 2002, James arrived and drove 10 hours across the African bush country to meet hospital administrators, Joseph and Mary. "I was completely unprepared for what I encountered," he explains. "No electricity. No running water. Seventy-five percent of their patients dying from AIDS. I cried most of the time I was there." James then met Newton, 6, at a Nairobi hotel. "It was wonderful to give him toys, clothes and money for his family to

purchase a cow. My eyes were opened to something that would change my life forever."

That summer, James collected used medical equipment and recruited seven more friends to go back to Kenya with him. In 2003, another seven people accompanied James. In 2004, he took 28 more. That year, he also built Marindi Children's Home of Grace. When 200 children were turned away, James expanded his efforts to provide relief for the orphans. "The campus has expanded to 60 acres with separate boys' and girls' dormitories, a cow barn, chicken house and bee farms. The children attend a new public school with six classrooms and a library."

The Brittney James Children's Fund was established to meet the most basic needs of the Migori people: Food, shelter and clothing.





photos courtesy of Kenya Relief

Kenya Relief encompasses the organization's long-range vision to collaborate with other groups on educational and medical projects.

"Through Fellowship North, we met Drew Dodson, pastor at Lake Valley Community Church," explains James. "After his visit to Kenya, other people from Hot Springs joined us."

Beginning June 4, eight teams comprised of 145 people from nine states will volunteer in 10-day rotations as part of an outreach to Africa's Luo tribe.

The Hot Springs delegation includes Dr. Jon Robert, a pediatrician; Dr. Tim Webb, an oncologist, and his son, Cody; Dr. Mike McFarland, an ophthalmologist; Dr. Neill Clem, an optometrist and his wife, Shari, a nurse; Sarah Gordon, Adona Wilson and Amy Bishop, nurses; and Sonny Richardson. Teams are housed on-site in the 24-room Brittney House.

This month's trip to Kenya will be the

third for Dr. Tim Webb. "We probably get more out of the experience than they do because the people are so appreciative of what they get," he says. "Over here, for instance, you never hear of somebody walking around with a perforated eardrum from an infection you didn't have an antibiotic to cure. In that respect, it's relatively easy to make a huge difference in someone's life."

"It really is true one person can make a difference," adds Webb's son, Cody. "We take so much for granted here. In Migori, it's not unusual for three people to share one ear of corn as their only food for the whole day. We get upset driving through heavy traffic. Over there, they have to share the road with snakes, porcupines, baboons, hyenas and lions. But you never hear them complain."

Dr. Mike McFarland is impressed by the stoic character of the people. "It's amazing to be around hundreds of people, including children, who do exactly what you ask them to do,

no questions asked, no fuss. Most of the patients we see for cataract surgery have walked through the bush for days, led by the hand of a small child. No food, no water. That in itself is a miracle. They have no idea who you are or where you came from. All they know is that somebody in Migori can heal diseases. Practicing medicine there is undoubtedly the most profound experience – not just of my medical career, which I love – but of my life."

James, 54-year old cancer survivor, says, "I'd like to see America wake up to the idea that the reason we've been blessed as a nation is to be able to give back." He notes a few spaces are still available on teams traveling to Kenya this summer. "We still need more doctors, especially pediatricians and infectious disease specialists. "Those who can't travel to Kenya can help sponsor team members who can go."

For more information, contact founder Steve James at 256-507-0217. ■