

African Mothers Health Initiative



Dear Friends,

I started following orphaned newborns in Malawi in 2006 and founded AMHI and Joyful Motherhood (*Chimwemwe mu'berekwi*) in 2008 to carry on the work. I am immensely grateful to all the donors who have supported this work over the past 12 years. I am also regularly awed and humbled by the beneficiaries of your good will. This year I would like to share a single story that illustrates our small but significant impact on a family.

Chikumbutsu's mother died in March 2006. She had come to the hospital on her own, delivered a baby girl and died moments later. I met Chiku, her father, and her grandmother the following day. Here is my blog entry from that time.... "I found her in the nursery, awake, silently mouthing her hunger, content for the moment, nestled in blankets. After a few hours her grandmother arrived with an expressionless face and devastated eyes. We sat down with the nursery nurse. When we were told that her father was outside, we called him in so he could also learn how to make milk for his daughter from the powder in a can. Both grandmother and father listened attentively, and when she became confused he explained the process again. I gave them a ride to the mortuary. The grandmother carried her daughter's things on her head, to and from the car, in a bag that almost eclipsed her upright figure. As the men pushed the body of her daughter into the ambulance that would take them to the village, I held her shoulders and then helped her in after the still form wrapped in an old blue blanket. I told the father I would meet him Saturday at 10am at the hospital, to give him more formula, and then we would travel together to his village.

"Saturday Nathan called at 9:56 to say he was waiting at the hospital. I arrived 15 minutes late. He greeted me with a friendly smile and we drove back together 50 kilometers to his home. I realized that he had biked 20 kilometers on unpaved roads from his house to a larger town, then boarded a minibus for the remaining 30km and was waiting for me by 10, in a suit. I imagined it was his only suit; threadbare with a tear in the knee. I imagined his wife in heavy labor making her way those 50 kilometers.

"As we drove, we discussed names for his daughter, Nathan chose Chikumbutsu, meaning "Remember us." He took me to his village and introduced me to his parents and sisters. They lived in neat mud brick homes with well swept

Tax deductible donations may be made by sending a check to AMHI 7304 Carroll Ave., #173, Takoma Park, MD 20912 or online at www.africanmothers.org/donation (please consider a recurring donation). We will be trying to match all donations through Caring Crowd, let us know if you do NOT want your donation matched.

yards. Then we traveled to his wife's family's village, another 12km away. He said that her family was keeping his five children because "They needed children around in such a time of sadness." When we arrived, he ushered me into a small dark room where many female relatives quickly gathered. I held Chikumbutsu as he called her name for the first time. His four year old daughter Pamela climbed into his lap. The women expressed their gratitude. I told them I was sorry. His oldest son Clement went to the field and returned with pumpkins and maize to fill my back seat. So much gratitude for so little, after too much had happened. Then I departed."



I continued to deliver formula and visit Chiku over the next year. The picture above is of Chiku and her maternal aunt. The picture to the left is of Chiku today with Beatrice Namaleu, our clinical director in Malawi. After years of silence, Beatrice went to find Chiku last week. She learned that Chiku stayed with her maternal grandfather until he died in 2015 and she currently lives in the same village with her maternal aunt. Her aunt expressed her gratitude for our support so many years ago. Chiku is in the 6th grade and doing very well in school. She says that someday she would like to become a nurse.

Without the early and vital support from AMHI and Joyful Motherhood, many babies like Chiku do not survive. Though our interventions are simple - regular health assessments, supplemental food, health education, and community mobilization by nurses - the impact is transformative. **African Mothers Health Initiative ensures that fragile infants and critically ill women receive life saving home based nursing care.**

It is incredibly difficult to mentally place ourselves in the shoes of people whose lives differ so dramatically from our own. It is incredibly difficult to witness pain and not turn away. Perhaps to protect our hearts or to avoid challenging our convictions, we tend to imagine certain people as fundamentally different - stronger, harder, more resilient, more capable, less fragile. So far, I have not learned this to be true. When we bear witness with quiet minds, our hearts are blown

wide open; uncomfortable lessons in humility grow into profound gifts of empathy. And, the gratitude expressed is immense. The stories of all our beneficiaries contain chords of struggle and tragedy. Often we are unable to respond to all the contributing factors, but thanks to you we keep showing up and doing what we can. Thank you for participating in this work by giving from your heart. May the positive ripples you make return to you as bountiful tides.

This year we raised \$82,764. With this money we purchased a 2014 Toyota Hilux; our fearless driver Mr. Ritchie drove thousands of hours so that our nurses could make a total of 1,547 home visits to sick women, orphans, premature babies, twins & triplets; we purchased many kilos of enriched porridge and distributed 3,546 tins of formula to babies without access to breast milk. Over the past year we cared for 249 babies and 63 women - visiting them, their families, & communities; supporting their health; developing relationships; and working together for better futures.

Happy Holidays and thank you for your continued support from Joanne Jorissen Chiwaula and the Board of AMHI (Genevieve Grabman, Apur Shah, Dehlia Ramos Gonzalez, Meera Nosek, Heather Satterfield, Shelly Broussard, and Melinda Lopez)