

BACK IN ACTION

FABLES OF THE RECONSTRUCTION



Tom Ouma could have gone anywhere in the world for hip revision surgery to replace a damaged and infected prosthetic hip. He chose Dr. Bryan Springer at OrthoCarolina.

PHOTO BY STEPHANIE CHESSON

RESTORING

A fresh start for a Kenyan educator living with a failed hip replacement

HOPE

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DR. BRYAN SPRINGER

TOM MBOYA OUMA HAS DEDICATED HIS LIFE to giving hope to orphaned, disabled and otherwise underprivileged Kenyan children.

But Tom’s work – along with his hope – was threatened when his right hip replacement failed and became so badly infected he could not be treated in Africa. That’s when his friends and neighbors, who were eager to reciprocate his lifelong generosity, contacted the Hip & Knee Center at OrthoCarolina.

RETURNING THE FAVOR

A 37-year-old Kenya native, Tom is a co-founder of Logos Christian School, which integrates children with physical and mental disabilities into regular classrooms. He also teaches kindergarten and oversees school-wide curriculum.

In addition, Tom is the co-founder and chairman of the board for Uzimatele Children’s Home, an orphanage for 11 children that also provides positive social activities for more than 80 children and teens from one of Nairobi’s poorest slums. He’s also a member of the board of New Dawn Kenya, a program that seeks to reduce the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Africa by educating pre-teens about the dangers of early and risky sexual behavior. New Dawn Kenya also manages a free girls’ high school in another Nairobi slum.

But what makes Tom’s tireless work most exceptional is that he has done it despite a lifelong battle with sickle cell anemia, a hereditary disease in which the body makes red blood cells in the shape of a “C” rather than the form of a disc. These abnormally shaped



Dr. Bryan Springer specializes in hip and knee replacement. He is a recipient of many academic, leadership and professional awards and has been recognized as an “Emerging Leader in the Field of Orthopaedic Surgery” by the American Orthopaedic Association. Dr. Springer completed his residency in orthopedic surgery at the Mayo Clinic and his fellowship in adult reconstruction of the hip and knee at the Harvard School of Medicine/Brigham and Women’s Hospital.

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cells are stiff and sticky, which makes them clump in the blood vessels and restrict blood and oxygen flow to the limbs and organs.

Over time, this lack of oxygen significantly eroded Tom's bones and joints, forcing him to undergo left and right total hip replacements in Kenya in his early 30s. Although the 2003 surgery on his left hip was a success, the 2005 procedure on his right hip was not. In addition to complications resulting from his right leg being shorter than his left, Tom endured a fracture that loosened the joint replacement as well as a deep infection that destroyed the bone around it.

Tom sought guidance from a number of local physicians, including Dr. Robert Mendonsa Jr., an American orthopedic surgeon working in Kenya with CURE International. Dr. Mendonsa and several others agreed Tom's case required specialty care not available in Kenya.

"I just about gave up, but my friends from church refused," said Tom. "They asked if it was possible for me to have surgery in South Africa, and explored options in India, Britain and Australia. That's when my friends found OrthoCarolina."

Tom's friends in Kenya recruited their friends in the U.S. to contact the Ortho-Carolina Hip & Knee Center, where Bryan Springer, MD, was eager to take Tom's case.

"We had a tremendous opportunity to help Tom regain his quality of life and walk without pain, which he hadn't done in quite some time," said Dr. Springer. "His case was complex and would require multiple surgeries, but we were eager to give back to someone who has given so much."

THE ROAD TO HEALING

In late March, Tom obtained his medical visa and made plans to stay in Kannapolis with hosts Becky and Nathan Hardenbrook immediately before and after surgery.

But for his longer-term recovery, Tom would travel to Pennsylvania, where his American-born fiancée Dawn, a physical therapist, would assist with his rehabilitation program. Tom first met Dawn several years ago when her parents were working in Kenya as missionaries. The two began dating



in 2007 and planned to marry in 2012, when Dawn would return to Kenya to work with disabled children.

Tom came to Charlotte in early April for his first surgery at Presbyterian Orthopaedic Hospital. During this procedure, Dr. Springer removed the infected implant from Tom's right hip and replaced it with a temporary antibiotic spacer. He also stretched Tom's right leg one and a half inches, making it more closely mirror his left leg.

"We knew Tom's bone had been severely eroded by the chronic infection in his hip," said Dr. Springer. "As a result, his prosthesis was loose and had broken out of his bone and would move around in his bone with every step. It was amazing he could even walk. His bone was about as frail as a potato chip."

In the immediate weeks that followed, Tom stayed in the hospital while the hospital's physical and occupational therapists taught him how to use crutches to get around without putting weight on his right side.

"Moving around was difficult at first, but now I am all over the place when I choose to,"

Tom wrote on his blog in late April. "The occupational therapists have taught me how to get around and do most things on my own, like getting in and out of a bath, or car, and going up and down flights of stairs, and generally living life without being a hazard to myself or anyone else."

Three weeks after surgery, Tom returned to Pennsylvania, where he tutored and cared for children close to Dawn's family. In addition, he continued his schoolwork from afar, maintaining regular contact with his students' parents and editing the weekly Logos School newsletter.

"I miss my students very much, and I know they miss me too," Tom said. "I get letters and e-mails from them, and a few have even been able to call. Hearing from them makes my day."

In addition to the antibiotic spacer, Dr. Springer prescribed six weeks of high-dose antibiotics to eliminate all traces of Tom's infection. Then, he administered regular blood tests during the next five weeks to ensure it did not reappear.

Tom is looking forward to a full recovery so he can return to Kenya to work with Logos Christian School and other philanthropic children's organizations he is involved with.

"Tom responded to the treatment very well," said Dr. Springer. "We could just see him getting better as the infection cleared from his system. Within two to three months of the first surgery, he was infection-free. Our next challenge, then, was to get the new implant stable in his bone and do our best to restore his bone stock."

OPPORTUNITIES OF A LIFETIME

Tom returned to Charlotte in late June – 11 weeks after his initial procedure – to receive his new total hip replacement. Since then, Tom's recovery has progressed smoothly and without incident. Dr. Springer is optimistic about his chances of making a full recovery.

"He's been through a lot for such a young man, but he has never complained," said Dr. Springer. "He has a long road ahead, but we are optimistic that he is cured of his infection and will be able to get back to the wonderful work he does for the children of Kenya."

For Tom, it's just one more example of the power of prayer.

"I'm overwhelmed by the number of people who have prayed for me, many who never met me and knew only my name and that I was from Kenya," he said.

In the end, Tom's journey presented not one, but two life-changing opportunities. He and Dawn married in Pennsylvania in late September, three years earlier than previously planned. They now hope to return to Kenya in two years, when Tom will return

to education and begin work to build a public library. Dawn hopes to raise disability awareness and accessibility throughout Kenya and elevate local standards in physiotherapy, particularly for underprivileged children. ☺

Tom and Dawn, a physical therapist, got married in September while Tom was recovering from his second total hip replacement. Tom is spending time with her family in Pennsylvania before he and Dawn return to Kenya.



PHOTO BY STEPHANIE CHESSON



GET HIP OrthoCarolina's Hip & Knee Center's sub-specialized physicians have served as collaborative pioneers in the development of today's modern hip and knee replacement surgeries. Surgical experience and volume are key indicators of successful outcomes in joint replacement, and OrthoCarolina Hip & Knee Center physicians collectively perform nearly 2,500 joint replacement procedures annually. The physicians' team approach to pre-operative planning and post-operative evaluation further contributes to the highest quality of care.

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