

Health, Education and Literacy Providers

Partnering with West Africa

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Fall



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A Life Transformed

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Memo line: Raye Elerson /Africa

This December, Raye Elerson will go to Nigeria to live for one year. He will be involved in overseeing the building and establishment of HELP's new orphanage, as well as aiding with other projects for HELP and Vision 360, a ministry in Jos, Nigeria. This much-needed help comes at an opportune time, but the road to Raye's calling to Nigeria has been a long process.

When God redeems a broken life, it is an amazing thing. Some stories you can only imagine – when the impossible becomes possible, when ashes become beauty. But the Kingdom of God is full of such stories, proving that He is not limited by hopeless circumstances. In fact, it is hopelessness that causes His Glory to shine even brighter, as we cry out to Him in our utter desperation.

Growing up, Raye never lived in one place for more than a year, rotating between his mom, dad, grandparents and at one point, a boys' home. Long-lasting friendships were hard to make, and he watched his mother's marriages fail five times. Amidst this instability, Raye's brother Wayne, who was six years his junior, became his closest friend. Wayne went to live with his dad for the first time at fifteen years old. He lived three hours away, and Raye would visit him once a month. In 1990, Wayne ran away from home and was missing for more than a year. Then in March of 1992, news

came that he had been murdered. He had run away with two of his friends; they had burglarized some homes and stolen a car, later stopping at an abandoned house in rural Arkansas. When Wayne told his friends he was going back because he couldn't continue that lifestyle, they became fearful he would turn them in to authorities. So, one choked him, while the other stabbed him to death. Then they covered him and the house with gasoline and set the place ablaze.

His brother's death was devastating, so Raye turned to alcohol and drugs even more heavily to numb the pain. He pushed everyone away, cut ties with his family, and swore he would never love anyone again. Life became consumed with thoughts of vengeance and hatred for the guys who had killed his brother. While on this destructive path, he wrecked two vehicles and each time was charged with a DWI. The second DWI charge was upgraded to "Aggravated Assault with a Deadly Weapon." Raye's devastation culminated at his trial on May 1, 1997, when he was sentenced to ten years in prison.

By this time Raye was a broken man. Reflecting on his life, he realized that something needed to change. Shortly after being locked up, a man came to the prison sharing about someone who would love him no matter what he'd done. Raye was intrigued and wondered, "Who could possibly love me, no matter what?" He listened from his cell, as the man spoke of Jesus. And on June 1, 1997, Raye received Christ as

Savior and was baptized. God put a hunger in him for the Word, and he began reading it relentlessly. He soon noticed how God was working in his life; he stopped cussing, lying and lusting after women. Many times he saw God protect him from violence and harm from other inmates. He recalls, "Gangs rule the prisons...one of five things usually happens...you either join a gang, pay for protection, get beat up a lot, have your stuff taken, or you're somebody's girl. I chose none of the above. I chose to trust in God, and for that, He protected me. I saw a lot of people get hurt in there, but no one ever touched me. Glory be to God." He got out on parole in October 2002, after serving five and a half years.

Later, Raye got connected with a group who believes that every person should use their story and experiences to serve others. So, he began reaching out to inmates through weekly prison ministry, hoping to impact others the same way he had been impacted. In 2006, he felt called to join HELP on a mission trip to Nigeria. He attended three trips and started to feel God calling him to a greater commitment. Raye now prepares to live in Nigeria for one year, thus living out God's calling on his life. To God be the Glory!



Raye Elerson

By John Wechter

John Wechter and Dr. Tony de Bari attended the September 2007 mission trip to Nigeria

My trip to Nigeria initially felt like it just fell together randomly, but it is apparent to me now that God had planned it from beginning to end; nothing was by accident.

As I transition from 3rd year to 4th year of medical school, the ever present question is "What do I want to spend the next 35 years of my life doing?" I knew I had an interest in surgery, but many doubts were in my mind: "Is the residency too long? Would it be better to go into something with a better lifestyle, like psychiatry?" I also knew I had an interest in working in underserved areas. I had gone to Peru in the past with a cleft palate team, and had a good experience.

"Arriving in Nigeria was like stepping back a few hundred years. The poverty and need were very apparent."



From Left: A Nigerian Patient, Dr. de Bari, Resident Physician in Egbe, Orthopedic Physician Who Routinely Helps in Egbe and John Wechter

During this school year, I actively sought out opportunities to go overseas again, hoping the experience would point me in one career direction. To my disappointment, most of the surgeons I talked to were not traveling anywhere in the near future. Others did not want to take medical students.

I was becoming disappointed and talked to my father, an OB-GYN who was going with another doctor to Central African Republic to practice primary medicine. I requested to accompany them only to find that there were no spots left! God's plan unfolded.

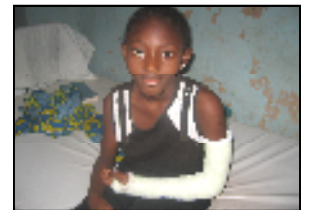
The next day, my father ran into Dr. de Bari, an Orthopedic surgeon from Saginaw, MI who was attending a mission trip to Nigeria to perform Orthopedic surgery! He said he would be happy to have me come along!

The timing of this encounter was amazing; the following day I received a call from the first doctor [going to the Central African Republic], saying a spot had opened up! I told him that I had already accepted another offer.

Arriving in Nigeria was like stepping back a few hundred years. The poverty and need were very apparent. We spent the first day seeing patients and assessing who would be a candidate for surgery. On Sunday, we experienced a Nigerian

church service which had beautiful music. Later in the day, we went out to a smaller, poorer town and provided HIV testing. Over the following 3 days, Dr. de Bari performed about 20 orthopedic surgeries with my meager assistance.

One of the cases was a 10 year old girl who had broken both bones in her forearm 1 month earlier. The bones had healed crooked and greatly deformed. The doctors there thought she would be fine if they did not fix the arm! Dr. de Bari explained that she would never be able to use the arm correctly if it was not fixed.



10 Year Old Girl Who Broke Both Bones in Her Forearm

He performed surgery on her, placing a pin to keep the bones in line, and then casting the arm. Her arm was now straight and she hopefully will have a lifetime of use out of it!

Many of the patients had traveled hours or days to get to the clinic dressed in their best clothes and amazed me with their gratefulness and kindness. Even if told that nothing could be done for them, they would respond with bowing and "thank you, thank you." (cont. next page)

This trip decided my career. I am now sure that I want to do orthopedic surgery especially in areas of need. It is the field I enjoy the most, and the field where I might be able to help change lives in a physical way.

Additionally, by providing service in the name of Christianity, I hope more people will be brought to Christ. I have only 1 quote saved on my computer. I found it 2 years ago and


could never figure out how it applied to me until now:

"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

~Fred Buechner



Pictures from September Trip



"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

~Fred Buechner

God's Provision!



We are very encouraged and excited to report how God has provided for our ministry ! Over the last several months He has encouraged us with new monthly partnerships as well as special gifts. In addition to these gifts, we have also had donations from individuals and churches that have allowed us to pay for 10 water wells to be built! It is so awesome to see God work in people's hearts and to trust and see how He will provide for our ministry. We can't thank you enough for your love gifts and moreover for your prayers in regard to our ministry!

Questions about donations? Please contact Lisa: lisa@helpwestafrica.org

Got Airline Miles?



As you might imagine, there is a large amount of traveling within our ministry. Between the quarterly trips to Nigeria and Dr. Tracy Goen attending speaking engagements

across the U.S. we keep the airlines in business! If you have airline miles that you would like to donate to HELP, we would be very blessed by that!

Please contact Courtney if you would like to donate airline miles:
Courtney@helpwestafrica.org





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Please check the appropriate boxes, fill out the information and send back to the H.E.L.P. Office

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- I would like to make a donation to H.E.L.P.!

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