

# Ugandans to the rescue



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## Touched by tragedy

Family struggles with questions after daughter dies after contracting malaria

Without the eager feet and excited voice of their 4-year-old daughter, the Strasses find their home has taken on a new silence. **Mother takes her daughter to Uganda to see relatives, a visit she will regret for life!**

Posted By Musa

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Brian LaPeter

Tracey Strass has kept her daughter Ashley's room as it was before the child's death in May. Ashley, 4, died in a hospital in Reston, Va., after contracting malaria during a trip to Uganda.

"If it weren't for the dogs, I don't know how we'd stand it," said Claude Strass. Claude and his wife Tracey can barely contain the constant grief they feel for the loss of their daughter Ashley, almost 5, who was a constant burst of energy and eager to start kindergarten

Imagine the so called International Hospital where many of the Ugandan elites nurse their lives, but can not even diagnose **MALARIA!** The very Hospital that many praise has doctor who can not even tell the difference between a **rare blood infection and Malaria!** **Fellow Ugandans** this is what Uganda has been reduced to, under the 25 years of Museveni dictatorship. Read Belo and see how this young mother experienced during her only 2 week stay in Uganda. She knew better than the doctors who killed her daughter but was powerless in country that has been declared a disaster by the United Nations. If they can't accurately diagnose Malaria, how can they diagnose Aids? If they can not Diagnose Malaria, can you trust them to give you blood transfusion?

this year.

Ashley Mirembe Strass was born June 23, 2006. Her death in Virginia on May 7 is under investigation by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which has determined that Ashley had malaria when she died, although the CDC has yet to establish cause of death. She had just returned from a trip to Uganda with her mother.

If the cause of death is malaria, the loss of Ashley's young life is especially tragic because the disease is preventable and curable. Only a handful of malaria deaths happen each year in the

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United States.

More than two months have passed since the terrible day the Strasses lost their daughter.

Her photos are placed through the Homosassa home. In a faltering voice, Claude read a framed tribute to Ashley written by Tracey. "Throughout the years, you developed your own personality: charming, friendly, loving, always talking to whoever bothered to listen. We celebrated your birthdays, holidays and your achievements.

"... Pancakes and French toast with syrup was your favorite breakfast. For lunch, mac and cheese did it for you. You were ready to learn from your father ...

You enjoyed swimming, taking walks, watching the sunset ..."

Ashley's big brother, Steve, who lives in San Francisco and works for General Electric, also wrote a tribute.

"Ashley left on a journey with her mother to Uganda for four weeks to meet with her family for the first time. She was so excited to be visiting Africa, her mother's homeland. While there, Ashley met so many who love her, her aunties, uncles, cousins and family and friends.

She was so cheerful and excited to be with her loved ones. Shortly after arriving, Ashley became ill. They traveled back home to Florida early. She was behaving so well for such a long flight home, telling her mom how much she could not wait to see her dad. On landing in Washington, D.C., for a couple-hour layover, her illness had progressed and she succumbed to the will of the Lord. It all happened so fast ... "God bless little Ashley. Our love for her is eternal." The loss of a child is heartbreaking in every case. "It doesn't get better," Claude said. Parents grieve and go over the details again and again. According to Claude, Tracey and Ashley went to the Citrus County Health Department for preventive medical treatment for their trip to Uganda, a trip the mother had planned for years to spend four weeks with her own family and introduce her daughter.

"On April 14, 2011, they left for what they thought would be a fun time," Claude said. "After about one week into the trip, Ashley contracted a high fever." Tracey took Ashley to Case, an international hospital, where she was diagnosed with a bacterial infection and treated with an antibiotic.

But her fever didn't break. Back at Case, Ashley was given more of the same medication, Claude said.

Showing no improvement, Ashley was taken to another medical facility, LifeLink, where more blood samples were taken. Again, Tracey was told Ashley had a bacterial infection and given a similar antibiotic. Tracey said when she suggested Ashley should be tested for malaria, the hospitals refused.

Being a disease caused by a parasitical organism transmitted by mosquitoes, malaria cannot be treated with antibiotics. They have no effect. On some days during her visit in Uganda, Ashley would seem to be well. But other days she'd run a fever. Tracey decided to fly her daughter home. During the layover at Dulles airport in Washington, D.C., Ashley became severely ill. She knew she was sick. Weeping, Tracey told of her last moments in the boarding area at Dulles Airport with her daughter.

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"I kept saying, 'What's wrong. Tell mommy what's the matter.' She kept saying, 'I want to go home. I want to see my daddy.' I told her, 'Daddy loves you. He wants you to get better when you get home. As soon as we get to the airport (in Tampa), we're going to take you to the doctor.'" Ashley took a nap. Tracey cuddled her and wrapped her in a blanket. "And then I saw her breathing hard," Tracey sobbed. "I woke her up and I looked in her eyes and she was already going. I screamed for help. I said, 'Somebody please help me. My baby's dying.'" Help arrived. Someone started giving Ashley CPR.

"The doctor brought her back three times," Claude said. Emergency services came, stabilized Ashley and gave her oxygen. Claude said when the oxygen was removed, Ashley "passed in a very short period of time" at a hospital in Virginia. The two parents lived the nightmare separated by the distance. "Tracey's there all by herself," Claude said. "She's not from this country. She's just lost her daughter and she's got no place to go. There are no flights coming back. I can't get up. She can't come down because there are no flights. It's too late in the day." Some kindly women set Tracey up with a hotel room that night. One of the women stayed with Tracey all night and the next day flew with Tracey to Tampa to get her back to Claude.

"They were like angels," Claude said. But no one in authority told the Strasses where Ashley's body was.

"It's a nightmare," Claude said. "The medical examiners up there were terrible as far as telling us where she is, what the procedure is, when she is going to be available, how we pick her up. In the beginning, we didn't know where she was at all." They got the airline to help find where Ashley was. Then, Claude said, he got a call from a staff member at the CDC.

"We did not contact them," Claude said. "They (the CDC) contacted us because of the irregularity with the hospital in Virginia; it didn't report her death for five hours. Apparently, that's not the way it's supposed to be. That's how the CDC got involved." In its ongoing investigation, the CDC, according to Claude, has determined Ashley had malaria at the time of her death. It is investigating Case and LifeLink hospitals in Uganda to determine why Ashley was misdiagnosed. It is looking at the role played by the county health department in providing preventive care. It is investigating the Virginia hospital about why Ashley was lost so fast and why the hospital didn't report the death in a timely manner.

No nightmare needs a second chapter, but the Strasses got one. On May 31, Tracey, who is expecting a baby in September, fell ill. According to Claude, the CDC got blood tests done to determine that Tracey had malaria. Several hospitals were contacted, until Tracey was sent to Winnie Palmer Hospital for Women and Babies in Orlando.

"If it wasn't for the good care at Winnie Palmer and the CDC, Tracey and her unborn son would also be dead," Claude said. "I cannot say enough about the CDC. This agency has been our angel and saved two lives." Many angels decorate Ashley's bedroom. Tracey concluded her tribute to Ashley: "For the times we shared together and the love you gave us, you will be our angel in heaven and on earth rest in peace. Love, Mom."

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