

# Unsung heroes

## Nancy's mission of mercy

BY SHAMLAL PURI

**N**ancy Hunt was an ordinary Kenyan settled in Abingdon, Oxfordshire, earning a living in a nine-to-five job as a civilian administrative worker with the Thames Valley Police.

Little did Nancy, who is married to Briton Jonathan Hunt, know that years later events back at her village in Mumias district, Kakamega County would change her life for good.

"In 2000, my 79-year-old mother Irene Mudeny was working in a sugar cane field," she says. "She heard a baby's cry near her land. This was not unusual because women take their babies with them when they go to work in the fields.

"The next day she heard the cry again from the same area. On the third day, she went to investigate the cries and found a three-month old baby lying on a blanket with a bundle of clothes next to him.

### JUST IN TIME

"She had arrived just in time. Ants were eating away at his skin. There was no skin left on his heels. She took him to hospital and arranged for him to get treatment."

When no one claimed the baby, whom she named Moses, she took him home and nursed him. She was attached to him.

When Nancy visited three months later, she met Moses, and was moved by her mother's sacrifice even though she was in her twilight years and struggling to look after Moses. Nancy was also alarmed by what her mother had done.

"I took her to the police station to find a home for Moses but they did not help."

She found a home with Catholic nuns but Moses never forgot Irene. He always recognised her voice when she visited him.

Nancy returned to Mumias in 2003 and found that her sister Lorna, who owned a small roadside kiosk, was feeding orphans and disadvantaged children.

"Even though poor, she fed a group of 60, and together with other women, she started the Nasio Women's Group which is named after my grandmother."

Together they supported 15 younger orphans by pooling food and organising volunteer teachers.

### WORRIED ABOUT ORPHANS

"When Lorna died suddenly aged only 45, everyone was worried about the orphans. I asked to see them and will never forget that day. They were distraught and I couldn't walk away," Nancy says.

She and Jonathan asked friends in UK to give money instead of Christmas presents. They collected over 1,000 sterling pounds to feed the orphans.

As Irene, who suffered from cancer, lay on her death bed, she made Nancy promise that she would not abandon the orphans and told her "whatever you do never leave those children. Please build a centre in the community where I found Moses."

Nancy took over the baton and Nasio Trust was born. It was registered as a UK charity.

"I was the chair of the trustees but now Nasio Trust has grown and we have six trustees with Jonathan as the chair. I direct the charity full time," she says.



ABOVE: Playtime for children at Irene Centre. RIGHT: A British construction volunteer. LEFT: A young British carpenter repairs a door. BELOW: A volunteer teaches an orphan at Noah's Ark Centre. [PHOTOS: SHAMLAL PURI/ COURTESY]



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Nancy needed to repair the kiosk kitchen Lorna ran in her village and rallied the local community in Berinsfield to raise funds.

She raised funds that were enough to take four volunteers to her village to help with the project. They were forced to demolish the kiosk when local officials claimed it breached rules of proximity from the road.

Nancy swung into action raising £30,000 to build a centre there. They are named Noah's Ark and St Irene, in memory of Irene Mudonyi.

Nasio Trust, says Nancy, encourages children to live among relations. They visit support centres for their meals and medication if they are unwell. Family events had taken their toll on Nancy.

She climbed Mt Kilimanjaro to seek solace and raise money for Nasio — an event which has now become a regular fund-raising fixture that attracts sponsored British climbers.

### MOTIVATE YOUNG OFFENDERS

Jonathan leads these climbers who also double as Nasio's volunteers. It also helps motivate young British offenders.

"Of the 100 young offenders from Berinsfield, Abingdon and Wantage who have been to Kenya to help on our projects none has been a repeat offender," Nancy says.

Nasio's work has attracted many Britons. Students from the prestigious Eton College have also been to the projects. Nancy's dedication has been recognised by the British Ve-

nus Awards where she was honoured with the Inspirational Woman Award. Over 20 British police officers, builders and entrepreneurs are participating in Nasio's 4 x 4 challenge — a six-day return journey to Kenya through Tanzania in memory of Livingstone, a five-year-old orphan who could not be ferried to hospital on time because there was no transport.

They will donate three vehicles to the community. The event will raise over £20,000 for new projects and create awareness of the issues affecting Kenyans.

Nancy pays tribute to her mother's dedication by saying that "you don't have to be a hero to change the world. This illiterate old lady had changed the lives of hundreds for the better."