

Beauty for Ashes

The remarkable story of Lyn and Jo Lusi

After a short term missions trip to the Congo in her 20s, *Lyn Lusi* vowed to never return. But God had other plans. Now, after 35 years in the country she once despised, Lyn speaks to *Nicole Partridge* passionately about her calling, the women she is trying to protect and the day that nearly destroyed everything . . .

It was 17 January, 2002. Despite warnings of a possible volcano eruption, Lyn Lusi continued with paperwork at her desk at the Heal Africa Hospital in Goma. Just 17 kilometres north, Mount Nyiragongo, which had been dormant for 25 years, began to stir. Tuning into local radio, Lyn listened to reports of early evacuations. Braving the rolling tremors, she kept working. Her husband Jo, an orthopaedic surgeon, was in another part of the hospital training American doctors.

By late afternoon, news reports confirmed an eruption. Lyn and Jo drove to the outskirts of town and watched in horror as a river of molten rock carved up the landscape. "Then all of the sudden, the earth was opening up underneath us," recalls Lyn. "Cracks started appearing in the ground. We ran like rabbits."

In a flurry of activity, the hospital was evacuated. Doctors, nurses and patients joined the 300,000 people from the city forced to flee their homes for safety. Within hours, liquid rock had engulfed homes, vehicles and the Lusi's precious hospital. Everything was buried. "There was nothing left," admits Lyn. Buried also were the hopes and dreams of this couple who had sown their lives into this unique hospital.

Devastated, yet pragmatic, the Lusi's set about rebuilding. Six years later with the help from around the world, they turned ashes into beauty. Today the hospital stands as a testament to the determination and faith of the Lusi's and their team.

The hospital is now bigger and better equipped than ever. Known as the hospital of choice for Eastern Congo, it employs six specialists, 12 trainees and some of the most sophisticated surgical suites in the country. Established in 1996, by Dr Jo Lusi, the primary mission of the hospital is to train and equip young doctors for rural service. In addition, the hospital offers HIV care and prevention, palliative care, rehabilitative surgery, orphan care, pastor care, micro-enterprise, and more recently; surgical and pastoral care for women who have been victims of gender-based violence. It's this issue that has become an ongoing focus for Heal Africa.

Brutal violation

According to the United Nations, hundreds of thousands of women and children aged between six months to 80 years have been systematically and sadistically violated in the Congo. "Rape is used as an instrument of war, to empty whole communities of people, to destroy economies and incite fear," explains Lyn. Human Rights Watch estimates that at least 30 percent of those targeted are sexually tortured and mutilated, usually with machetes, sticks or gun barrels thrust into their vaginas. Increasingly, the trigger is pulled. The younger ones, aged between eight and 14 are abducted and forced to become sex slaves.

Lumo was just 20 when she and her friends were targeted by Hutu militia (those responsible for the Rwandan genocide in 1994). Gang raped and left for dead, Lumo's injuries were

so brutal; the skin between her vagina and bladder tore causing permanent incontinence. She hid with her mother, shamed by her constantly soiled clothes and putrid smell. Yet Lumo was one of the lucky ones. She finally made it to the Heal Africa hospital where she underwent reconstructive surgery and pastoral counselling.

Lumo then became the subject of an award winning documentary, of the same name, screened around the world earlier this year. The raw, compelling, and very real film highlights the plight of Congolese women. "The purpose of the Lumo documentary is to raise awareness of the Congo situation," says Lyn. She then encourages Australians to write to their members of parliament, asking how Australia is supporting the peace process in the Congo. "It's the pressure from people that moves politicians to action," she adds.

A catalyst for change

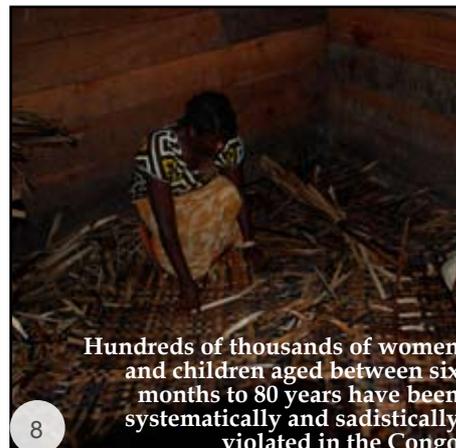
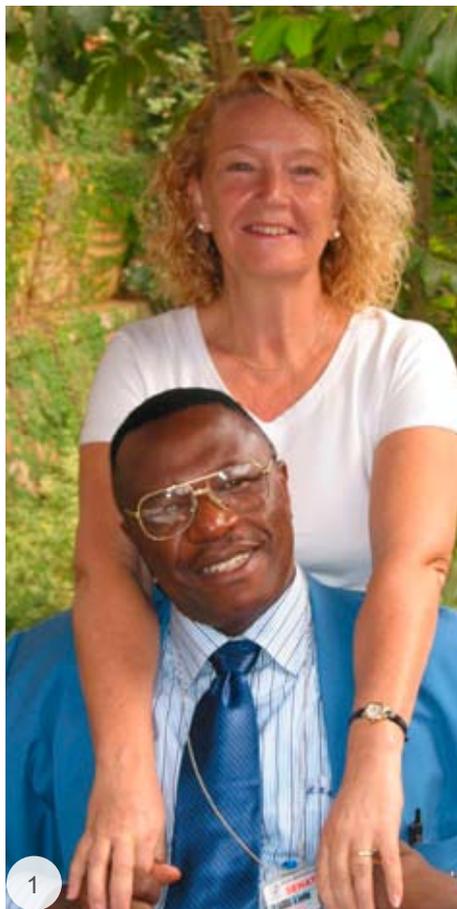
Lyn, 59, is a diminutive softly spoken woman who exudes calm. When she speaks, in that very quiet unassuming British accent, her words are gripping and insightful. After 35 years living in Africa, she understands all too well the issues faced by the women, and while she has a desire to pioneer change in the Congo, she also admits there was a time when the thought of living in Africa terrified her.

Born in Ramsgate, a seaside town in the South of Britain, Lyn says missions work first captured her attention at the age of seven after hearing a missionary speaker at her church. But her dreams were soon quashed after a visit to a local hospital proved too much for her to bear. "I was squeamish the whole time and couldn't stand to look," she says, laughing. "So I decided to drop the nurse bit and subsequently my desire for missions."

Abandoning her desire to serve in Africa, she studied literature and French at university. Then after completing her degree, a friend suggested she do something worthwhile with her summer holidays. This proved to be a turning point, with Lyn rediscovering her love for God and her desire to make a difference. At the age of 21, she embarked on her first short term missions trip to the Congo. But it wasn't all she expected. After several months of battling depression and uncertainty about her future, she decided to return to England before enrolling at a Swiss Bible College.

Believing that her childhood dream to be a missionary was well and truly over, she concentrated on her studies at Bible school. However it wasn't long before she met and fell in love with a young, larger than life, Congolese doctor by the name of Jo Lusi. They married on the banks of the Geneva River, and in a God inspired twist of fate, ended up back in the country she felt she once hated.

The Lusi's have been married for 34 years and have two children, now aged 31 and 27. During her Australian tour recently, Lyn spoke about her beloved Congo with passion and



1. Jo and Lyn Lusi; 2. Staff in front of hospital; 3. Heal Africa building; 4. Some women waiting for VVF surgery; 5. The Heal Africa surgery; 6. Car cemetery in Goma; 7. Heal Africa medical staff; 8. Lumo learns to weave.

conviction. Undeterred by the conflict and violence that claims 1000 lives a day, her vision remains clear: to be a catalyst for change in a nation that has no regard for women. She also stands proudly alongside Dr Jo who has a continuing vision for the training of young doctors in all areas of medicine.

“Jo is full of enthusiasm and plans,” says Lyn smiling. “He goes at 100 miles an hour and I follow closely behind.” And just like their volatile neighbour which continues to bubble away, so to do the dreams of this remarkable couple. CW

For more information on how you can be involved in this ministry in war torn Eastern Congo go to www.cncpi.com.au (Australian partner of Heal Africa).

Lumo

Lumo is an extraordinary documentary which tells the story of Lumo Sinai, a young woman attacked and raped by militia causing permanent injuries. Rejected by her fiancé and cast aside by her family, Lumo had to endure five operations and two years in hospital before she was able to return to her village. This 72 minute compelling documentary gives a face to the tens of thousands of women in the Congo with the same fate.