

## A Doctor's Passion Takes Him to Uganda

<b>Segment</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Copy</b>
Intro	Dr. Harry Strulovici	The love, the meaning that I have received, what was given to me at this point in my life, I will never ever be able to give back to them. And that is something that I will always keep and take to my grave. I wish and I want to do so much more because these people are such good people.
		INTRO MUSIC
Podcast Overview	Andy	<p>Welcome to Second Act Stories, a podcast that looks at people who have made major career changes and are pursuing more rewarding lives in a second act. The stories are in their own words and the words of friends and family that helped them find a new path.</p> <p>I'm your host Andy Levine. Every two weeks we bring you a new, second act story.</p> <p>Dr. Harry Strulovici was a successful plastic surgeon with a thriving practice in Michigan. But when his father passed away, he took a close look at his own life. And that took him back to school and then 7,000 miles away to Uganda.</p>
	Andy	I wanna go back to your original practice, I saw you went to Rutgers and was a surgeon for 30-plus years. Can you tell me about that practice that you have?
An Early Career in Medicine	Dr. Harry	I went to Rutgers Medical School and subsequently entered into a surgical residency, general surgical and plastic surgery. And ended up doing a fellowship in plastic surgery in Michigan, and befriended another plastic surgeon and we worked well together. I did a fellowship with him for about six months, and we decided to open up our own clinic.
	Andy	His father was having some heart problems and he decided to take six months off to help get him in better shape.
My Father's Passing	Dr. Harry	<p>He had always suffered from heart disease, and it came to the point where he was going to require open heart surgery.</p> <p>So I made a promise to him that I would take care of him during this period, and he underwent the surgery, and unfortunately about two, three months after the surgery he died. And so that experience was a very monumental experience for me, and I decided to re-evaluate where I was in my life at that point.</p>
	Andy	Tell me about the reevaluation of your life, because it sounds like that was sort of a critical moment in this process.

	Dr. Harry	<p>It was. I believe that part of it had to do with the fact that during my educational years including medical school I made a conscious decision to speed up the process. That is to say that I completed college in three years, as well as taking one year less of junior high school, as the way they called it at that time, and also a year of elementary school.</p> <p>So I was very young, in fact, at the Medical School, Rutgers, I was the youngest person there. So this was an opportunity after my father died that I could relax so to speak, in terms of taking more time for myself, and seeing where I wanted to go with my life.</p>
	Andy	His new path emerged in a strange way – from watching an interview on a television program.
	Dr. Harry	<p>I had a very close friend who happened to be watching, "Charlie Rose," and there was a physician on the program Dr. Allan Rosenfield who was...I didn't know at the time at all, was a pioneer in improving access to healthcare for women around the world. And he was at Columbia, and head of the public health school.</p> <p>And I happened to listen and watch that interview and was very moved by what he had to say. And it certainly more than tweaked my interest in the fact that women around the world do not get the kind of service that they should have. And that women, mothers actually get less care than the infants and children.</p> <p>So that was a trigger for me to pursue this area.</p>
Back to Medical School	Andy	Dr. Harry went back to school enrolling in a Global Health program at the New York University School of Medicine. His mentor at NYU recommended him to a special program that was a collaboration between Yale University and Johnson & Johnson.
	Dr. Harry	<p>And so I was accepted as a scholar, and that summer spent three months, happened to be in Uganda. And their intention was to marry my surgical skills with my interest in women's rights and empowerment.</p> <p>And so I went there to learn this operation that women sometimes suffer when they're in labor and they do not have access to a Cesarean section, which is what they require. So they can be in labor for a day or two or even longer. And so, sadly, they could die, the baby, the newborn, the fetus could die, or they could end up with a complication called an obstetric fistula.</p>
	Andy	Tell me about getting off the plane, and what you experienced when you arrived in Uganda?

Arriving in Uganda	Dr. Harry	<p>Well, the settling in process was very, very short, less than a day, and then they introduced me to the gentleman, the surgeon who specialized in this fistula surgery. In terms of...fistula is just a...not just, it's a hole that develops because of a baby being stuck in the birth canal, and the tissue dies because it's being crushed by the fetus. And that tissue dies and a hole can develop between the vagina and the bladder, and/or the rectum. And so she can leak urine or feces and/or both.</p> <p>So when that hole exists, it's necessary to close the hole. So this doctor Dr. Justus Barageine became a close friend, but he's the one who I stayed with, and basically hovered around him, and learned to do the surgery with him.</p>
	Andy	Dr. Harry worked at Mulago Hospital, the largest and best medical facility in Uganda. But by Western standards, it left a lot to be desired.
Life at Mulago Hospital	Dr. Harry	<p>The state of the hospital was really surprising to me as to how decrepit it was. And I know that sounds bad, but it was not in good condition.</p> <p>I was supposed to meet Dr. Barageine at the labor ward, and when I walked...and so it's like four walls and there's a central atrium that's open air.</p> <p>And so on this labor and delivery floor outside, there were literally dozens of women with blankets, foods. It was very unusual to see a man there, and so some of the women were with their mothers and certainly kids, and infants, and with food. And they were waiting to receive treatment. And this is a scene that was repeated to me when I started the morning at 7:00, and I would end the day at 7:00 at night. And this is what I witnessed on a daily basis.</p>
A Picture of Women's Health in Africa	Andy	To get a picture of women's healthcare in Uganda, sometimes you can tell a story through a single person. I'm curious in either your initial time there or in some of your follow up visits, is there a story of someone who symbolized perhaps the healthcare troubles or problems in Uganda's system?
	Dr. Harry	<p>Who comes to mind actually was this 16-year-old girl who... It's just a horrendous situation. Who was raped at the age of 15 or 16, and she ends up being HIV positive and ultimately developed AIDS.</p> <p>So she had AIDS, she had been raped, and now she was there to have her fistula repaired...</p>
	Andy	So she had a child I'm assuming.

	Dr. Harry	<p>And she lost the child. And so you wonder how does this woman continue to live when she has gone through all of this. Basically, her psyche, her body has sustained so much violence, where does she get the strength to continue. And you shudder, at least I did with Dr. Justus Barageine to see her in this kind of state.</p> <p>I mean, obviously she suffers from PTSD, and you wonder how is she gonna continue, and where is her support system. And she will always stay with me, she will always stay with me, and I cannot forget that that kind of injustice continues to the present day.</p>
	Andy	<p>So you're there, you spend these three months, it sounds like regardless of what you had been prepared for in your class, this was a pretty stark awakening for you.</p>
	Dr. Harry	<p>It was extremely stark, and the thing that moved me the most was when I was at Mulago and witnessed the fact that all these women were waiting to receive care. And it was mind-boggling to me. And leaving at night and coming back the next day and seeing some of these women and they still had not received any kind of care, was unacceptable to me.</p> <p>And I felt that the numbers, the math did not make sense in terms of doing such a small amount...few cases, and new fistulas developing that you'd always be behind the curve. And the answer was to develop some kind of holistic strategy where the woman would get health services before fistula would develop. And that's when I decided to go out and seek government support. And we entered into discussions as to how we might be able to change health policy.</p>
A Pilot Project in Uganda	Andy	<p>And so with the help of Uganda's government, Dr. Harry developed a pilot program in one specific district of Uganda.</p>
	Dr. Harry	<p>Because there was such a shortage of medical personnel, meaning physicians, nurses, midwives, it was obvious that one would have to engage the local population, which meant training people in the community to become involved, and have them develop certain skills that might have been performed by people who were higher up the food chain, so to speak.</p> <p>So we recruited people from the district, our pilot program was composed of 50 villages. And so there were two aspects, the two aspects were to recruit community health workers to train them, and also develop this tool which was mobile health technology.</p> <p>We were able to get 5500 electronic health records in 17 days, including 1600 women of reproductive age. And we had an incredible amount of information.</p>

	Andy	And this gave you a census of sort of the health situation in this district in terms of knowing what the problems were?
	Dr. Harry	Absolutely
	Andy	Which had never existed before?
	Dr. Harry	<p>That's absolutely correct. There were women there in their teens: 17, 18 years old, and some of the questions we asked them was, have you ever been tested for HIV? Have you ever been examined by a doctor? Are you familiar with any type of contraception or anything like that?</p> <p>And we learned that these women...it wasn't as if they weren't intelligent they just did not know that this was available to them, and they sadly entered the healthcare system once they got pregnant. it didn't make sense because these pregnancies were unwanted, and in this country abortions were illegal. And that's a leading cause of maternal mortality is the performance of illegal abortions.</p>
	Andy	If you remember back to earlier in this episode, Dr. Harry first became interested in global health issues after a close friend encouraged him to watch Dr. Allen Rosenfield when he appeared on the Charlie Rose show. I had a chance to speak with that friend, a man named Walter Aurell, by telephone.
	Walter	<p>When he came back he was just shooting off sparks. He was just really moved by what he saw in terms of what he saw. Just to witness that and to feel that he has within his power something to offer these people and to help with the situation. I would say it was completely life-changing.</p> <p>He really redefined his value system and I think he would say and I would agree that he is a much deeper and better person because of that experience.</p>
	Andy	As a final question, I asked Dr. Harry about his best advice for others considering a second act.
Best Advice for Others Considering a Second Act	Dr. Harry	<p>It's my belief that if you pursue another area, you must have a passion for it, you must have a stick-to-itiveness to it.</p> <p>It may not turn out to be what you had hoped it to be but that really doesn't matter, it may grow on you. And it certainly helps to have a support system behind you that will reinforce what you want to do. And of course, the financial aspect cannot be ignored, you have...many people have families, and they need a certain amount of independence.</p>

		<p>Again, it depends where you want to do your career if you want to keep in the United States, that's great, but I think the most important thing is do something that you love, that you really want to do. And be realistic, there's no shame in going back to school and there's certainly no shame or embarrassment in pursuing a second career.</p>
		<p>OUTGOING MUSIC</p>
<p>Thank-You and Show Credits</p>	<p>Andy</p>	<p>Of course, we want to thank Dr. Harry Strulovici for sharing his story with us.</p> <p>We also want to let you know about Life for Mothers, a non-profit Dr. Harry created after returning from Uganda. Life for Mothers seeks to identify, address, and prevent complications that arise during pregnancy, labor, delivery, and postpartum, ultimately decreasing maternal and infant mortality rates. You can learn more at <a href="http://LifeforMothers.org">LifeforMothers.org</a>.</p> <p>If you know of a "Second Act Story" that we should profile, please contact me, that's Andy Levine, at <a href="mailto:SecondActStories@gmail.com">SecondActStories@gmail.com</a>. I'd love to hear from you.</p> <p>And if you are thinking of starting your own second act, we hope Dr. Harry's and the stories of others will help you find a new path</p> <p>We hope you'll keep listening. A new Second Act Story" is just two weeks away.</p>