



20 years of healing ...  
c'est magnifique!

We hope you enjoyed the story of Mamou the Magnificent. It marks a significant anniversary for us: 20 years of service to thousands of children from scores of countries all around the world. And 20 years of faithful support from all of you—that which makes it all possible.

Truly, there is magnificence in Mamou's story—in her small person and in her enormous spirit; in the small acts of love that marked her healing journey and in the enormous idea that yes, it's possible to change the world, one Mamou at a time.

It's a blessing to do this work, and it's a blessing to be able to thank all of you for believing and giving, for supporting the small acts of love and the enormous idea.

It's a blessing to know that you'll continue to do all those things.

A high hand to you! You are magnificent!



**Healing  
the  
Children®**

**MICHIGAN-OHIO CHAPTER**

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20th Anniversary Edition  
Mamou the Magnificent

Healing the Children / Michigan-Ohio

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*The Story of Mamou, a Work in Progress*

*Here's our holiday message, the story of one remarkable—no, magnificent—little girl. Read it and know everything about what Healing the Children is, does, and means. These are the words of host mom Kim Sterneberg.*

Mamou Bagayoko is from Burkina Faso, West Africa. She came to the United States when she was six years old. Mamou is being treated at Shriners Hospital for Burns in Cincinnati. She's made an amazing recovery from her initial injury and early treatments, had a formidable journey to America, made a remarkable adjustment to life in this country, and achieved successful healing from corrective surgeries. Her story is similar to those of many children we've met with Healing the Children, yet each child is unique, and this is Mamou's story.

My husband Steve is a family practice physician who volunteers with Healing the Children. Our youngest daughter Missy was 20 and in college when Mamou arrived. Our daughter JoAnn was 22, had just graduated, and was moving home during her student teaching. We are now MommaKem, DaddySteve, Miss-a' and JoieAnn.

During her first few months with us I would tell Mamou a story each night called "Mamou the Magnificent," about a little girl from Burkina Faso and her life in Africa, and how she had traveled to the United States "with the stars" (as Mamou had described her overnight trip to us). Each day we would add another adventure that Mamou the Magnificent had conquered and that MommaKem and DaddySteve had survived!

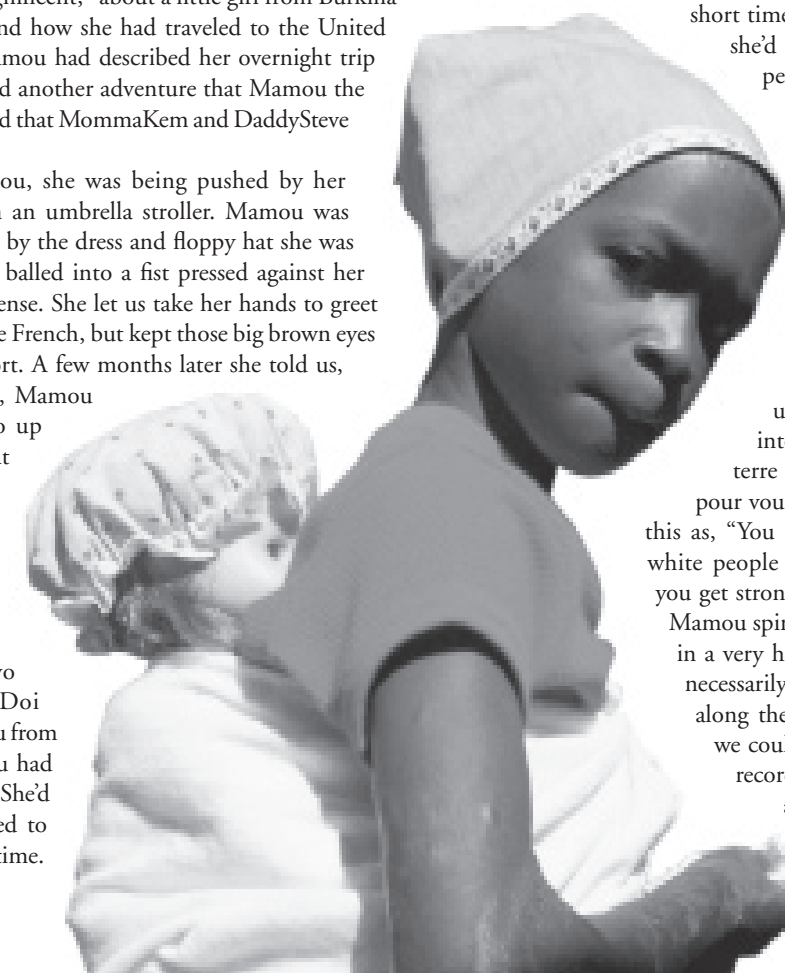
When we first met Mamou, she was being pushed by her Airline Ambassador escort in an umbrella stroller. Mamou was very small and was swallowed by the dress and floppy hat she was wearing. Her right hand was balled into a fist pressed against her mouth, and her eyes were intense. She let us take her hands to greet her and giggled when we spoke French, but kept those big brown eyes on us as we spoke to the escort. A few months later she told us, "MommaKem, MommaKem, Mamou see MommeKem's mouth go up and down up and down, but all Mamou could hear was blablablabla!" I love that and try to apply it to my daily life. Miss-a' and JoieAnn don't let me forget it!

We'd already received two phone calls from Masako Doi while she was escorting Mamou from her home to the U.S. Mamou had been a handful on her journey. She'd talked, screamed, kicked, tried to bite, and wiggled the entire time.

We knew that she'd run away once in an airport and multiple times on the planes. As we looked at this tiny six-year-old, as small as some toddlers, knowing her left arm was bound to her side through scarring, that most of her scalp had received burns as well as her back and right arm, we were just amazed at her spirit and energy. We soon came to be amazed at her speed.

That night, after we told her our names, Mamou immediately put "Momma" in front of mine. When we explained that Steve was Missy and JoAnn's daddy, "Daddy" went in front of his. In Mamou's mind, MommaKem was at the top and everyone else was at the next level. There was no higher authority to Mamou than MommaKem, and she reminded our girls of this constantly. Bent to her side, looking up at them with her left fist on her hip and waving the pointed finger of her right hand at them, shoulders swinging, she would tell them, "You no MommaKem!" When I returned home, I'd receive what we call "the full report" from Mamou in one long phonetically learned sentence. "MommaKem JoieAnn say...Mamou say...JoieAnn say..."

We decided Mamou's philosophy was "It's harder to hit a moving target." She didn't stop until she'd curl up where she was and sleep a short time when I'd take her to her bed. Then she'd be up and at it again. A wonderful person, Jackie Cain, a retired French teacher, came the next day to stay with us to help communicate with Mamou. We found out that Mamou did speak French, but this was intertwined with an African language. Jackie also learned more about her family in Burkina and Cote d'Ivoire and found out what Mamou had been told about this trip. Mamou would stop, stand up as straight as she could, and point into the distance, saying, "Vous irez à la terre blanche et aurez un momma blanc pour vous rendre fort." Roughly I understand this as, "You are going to where there are many white people and have a white momma to help you get strong again." But mainly we all watched Mamou spinning, running, dancing, and singing in a very high-pitched voice over and over, not necessarily in that order. Mamou literally ran along the top of the back of our sofa before we could catch her. Steve got the camera to record the action, and we have a picture of a very tired-looking MommaKem and Mademoiselle Cain, with a blur that is Mamou.





Over the next few days we learned a lot about Mamou and the young aunt raising her. We learned that Mamou had been taught not to spit in the house, but to go outside. When we began brushing her teeth she would hold her mouthful of toothpaste in until we let her out the front door to finish. We learned that one of Mamou's jobs had been to fetch water for her and her aunt. When we ran water Mamou would fill up the little Dixie cups to catch it and then line them up on the sink. We learned that Mamou knew not to waste food. Any food left on a plate was upsetting to her, and we would receive a finger-wagging scolding. We all began putting smaller portions on smaller plates, a good lesson for us to learn and one we still practice.



Mamou had "favor" things (some English we can't bring ourselves to correct, and have adopted the "new" word for ourselves). Salad was her favor food for many months, and still is one of her top ten. After she was introduced to salad, she would throw herself against the refrigerator and cry, "Salaaaad, salaaaad," until we'd finally pry her off. We learned that singing and "danca" (the second "a" long) are Mamou's favor things, and that the word "no" in any language was her least favor thing to hear.



the word "no" was about to appear. I think Mamou finally got tired of laughing at us and settled down. From their first meeting, she has loved our niece Christine, age 8. Christine and Mamou are best friends. Mamou went to a summer ESL program before her first surgery, but play is really how Mamou learned English and sitting. From the other room we'd hear Christine playing school with Mamou: "Sit, Mamou, sit!"



Mamou had never brushed her teeth, and almost all of her baby teeth had cavities. She had multiple abscessed teeth and had to have oral surgery before she could begin her surgeries at Shriners. A very kind and excellent pediatric dentist and oral surgeon, Dr. Robert Ross, arranged this for us. It was done at St. Luke Hospital, and Mamou was a new child the next day. So much of her behavior had probably been in response to the pain she had in her little mouth. She could tolerate cool and cold things for the first time and she told us that her ears didn't hurt when she jumped up and down or chewed her food.



Mamou's doctor at Shriners is Dr. Jennifer Butterfield, and she was wonderful from the beginning. She got down low and spoke directly to Mamou and would listen to her carefully. In Mamou's new English and vocabulary, Dr. Butterfield became "Dr. Butterfly" and is still Dr. Butterfly at the hospital, to us, and in Burkina Faso as well. We still needed to translate some then for Mamou, so I brought pictures of her aunt and some of her favor things to do and eat so she could tell about herself, too. Dr. Butterfly let Mamou tell her about salaaaad and chicken and

her friends. After two rounds of surgeries, she has given Mamou a strong arm, five digits that work perfectly and a beautiful axilla (underarm).

We'd prepared her for plastic surgery as best we could in French and English, and the liaison in Burkina spoke with her in her home language, but it's still a very scary thing. Mamou would tell us, "Is OK, Mamou no more ouchie." We had to explain to her that there would be a BIG ouchie first, then no more ouchie. The donor sites are a huge ouchie, and the kids that deal with this are always just unbelievable to me. All through Mamou's dressing changes and therapy over the next few months she would tell me, "Is OK MommaKem, you love Mamou, is OK." Of course, if



you speak with Mamou's first nurses at Shriners, Sue and Pam, they will tell you some great stories about facing Mamou's will head to head! After Mamou's first surgery for the arm and hand release, she wore a splint and brace that kept her arm up and out from her left side for several weeks. She loved that high arm, but she didn't love physical therapy. She would get that look in her eye, but instead

of trying to bite or run, she could settle herself down by then and would do what we needed. She called it her "high hand" and told her physical therapist that she would trick her friends in Burkina by keeping her hand low, then wave high at them.



From the beginning Mamou loved playing dress up. Shortly after Mamou came, Christine's family became an HTC host family for Stephanie, a little girl from Liberia also being treated at Shriners. With all the scarves, old prom dresses and hats draped over their mini-bodies they enter a different world and are beautiful... Mamou believes a girl can't have on too many crowns, boas, and butterfly wings! Mamou ties a scarf holding a baby doll to her back dressed like this, and off she goes around the neighborhood. JoieAnn was married this past June, and the girls were in the pick

out their pouffy dresses with rose petals, let them wear a tiara and a ring of flowers with a veil in the back, but finally drew the line when they were adding a set of wings to their ensembles.

In time, as Mamou settled down in kindergarten, the constant danca' began to disappear, but not totally. After her bath or getting ready for



bed are still major danca' times. While I was brushing her teeth one morning getting ready for kindergarten, I was explaining to her that there are times when she shouldn't danca'. She held her upper body still, then looked up at me and said, "Oh MommaKem, my bottom, it danca!" while her lower half wiggled.

Steve takes Mamou to the nursing homes with him once a month for rounds, as he did with JoieAnn and Miss-a'. One of the ladies gave Mamou a dressed-up stuffed bear she had and asked Mamou what she was going to name it. Mamou was thinking, and when the woman, named Helen, suggested naming the bear "Helen," Mamou shouted, "Yes, HelenSalan!"



Now we have HelenSalan, a beautiful bear in a long pouffy pink dress with a pink hat, with us wherever we go.

There are more surgeries in Mamou's future, and she is also being treated at Children's Hospital Medical Center for other medical problems, but her injury and the things she can't do aren't what define her anymore. She can swim and ride a bike. Mamou isn't just watching other children go to school and learn, she is. She's in first grade and can read and write, knows her addition and subtraction tables, and excels in singing and running. She loves her teachers, principal, and friends and tells them so. And they love her. HTC's Burkina liaison Biba Foadey wants Mamou to be medecin when she grows up to help the people in Burkina Faso; Mamou wants to be a zoo-petter and baby-sit kittens when she grows up. Her story is still being told.

Our family thinks Mamou's story is a "magnificent" one, but we know all the HTC children have amazing people in their lives who loved them enough to get them the care they need. We think of their stories. We think of Biba, who was at the free clinic regarding another child when a doctor overheard her and asked if she could please find Mamou and see if HTC could help her. The doctor had been involved early on with Mamou's case and even though nothing more could be done for her at the clinic, she didn't want to give up, because, she told Biba, "Mamou is a special child." She hadn't seen Mamou for some time, but gave Biba an old address.

When Biba returned to the clinic with Mamou in two weeks, she found that the doctor had suddenly passed away. My family thinks often of this young woman physician from the Congo and the part she played in Mamou's life. We think of Mamou's young aunt who didn't give up on Mamou and said no to the first doctors who wanted to amputate Mamou's arm. We have so much respect for her courage. We think of Biba, who listened and acted and kept trying. After Mamou stayed at their home for a short time, her husband told her, "Biba, we might not be able to help this one," but Biba knew they had to. We think of Mamou's escort, Masako Doi (and sometimes we laugh until we cry!), who won an Airline Ambassador International escort of the year award for bringing her. We think of our director, Helen Salan, who looked at the small picture Biba sent, said yes, and then made it happen. We think of Dr. Butterfly, who gave Mamou her "high hand," and we think how happy her colleague from the Congo must be.

This is Mamou's story. Surely she has been touched by the magnificent magic of Healing the Children.

