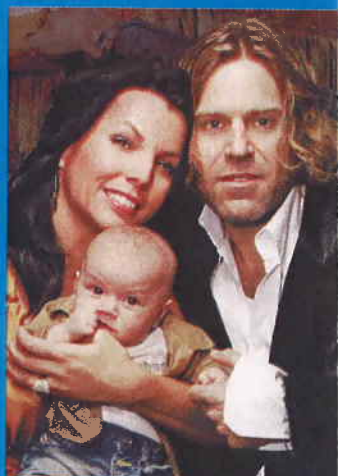


MARCH 13, 2006

People



**DANCING'S
CHERYL & DREW**
Behind Their Win



BIG & RICH
Kenny's New Baby



**FAREWELL
DON KNOTTS**

BATTLING BREAST CANCER

SHERYL CROW'S ORDEAL

Weeks after she and Lance Armstrong called off their wedding, the singer receives a frightening diagnosis. How she's coping



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Fashions come and go. But strong odor protection with no white marks is always in style. That's why Secret Platinum Clear Gel is clearly a keeper.

MY SECRET



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Inside People



"Malawians are the most welcoming people I've met," says Green, learning to bear water.

This week PEOPLE goes to the African nation of Malawi, one of the poorest countries on earth, for a special report on the Millennium Villages project. Under the direction of antipoverty crusader Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, a United Nations adviser, it has a simple but staggeringly ambitious goal: to wipe out poverty in a world where almost half the population exists on \$2 or less a day and millions die each year from malnutrition and diseases that, in richer countries, are easily cured. Sachs—who has enlisted such celebrities as Bono and Angelina Jolie in his cause—targets the most impoverished towns and villages, chosen on factors such as location and agricultural needs, and provides the people there with the materials and expertise to build healthier, more prosperous lives. One such community is Gwengwere, Malawi, where correspondent Mary Green spent three days

on the ground watching a new Millennium Village take root and following the story of Gift Msunzi, a 3-year-old boy with malaria, and his family as they raced to save his life. "This family's ordeal was heartbreaking," says Green. "I saw firsthand what happens when people, especially children, don't have basic needs, like food, water and medicine."

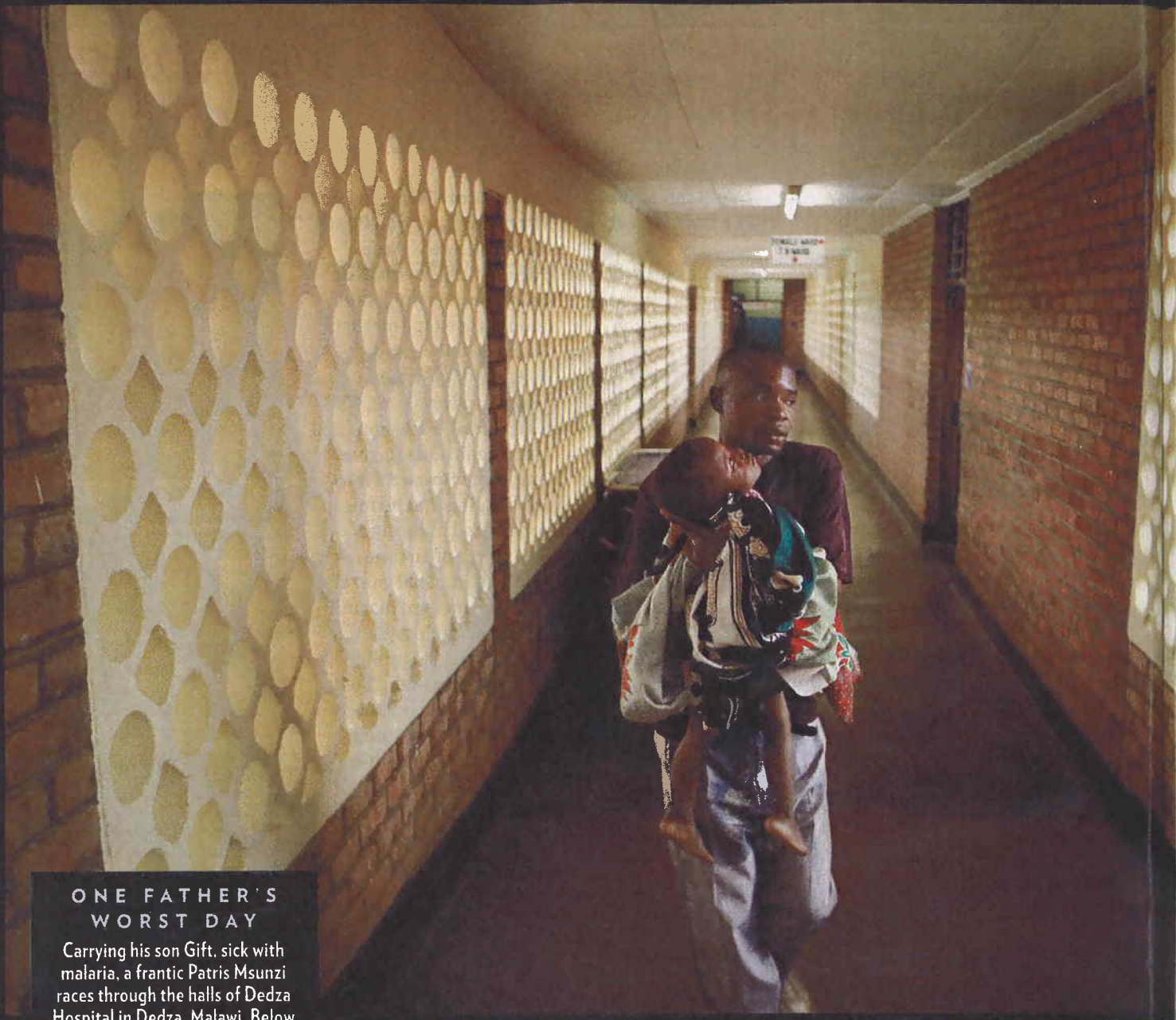
How will life in Malawi change? Later this year PEOPLE plans to return, to see whether high hopes pay off in tangible results. For more on Malawi, including Green's online reporter's notebook and a photographic portfolio, log on to www.people.com/malawi.

LARRY HACKETT, MANAGING EDITOR

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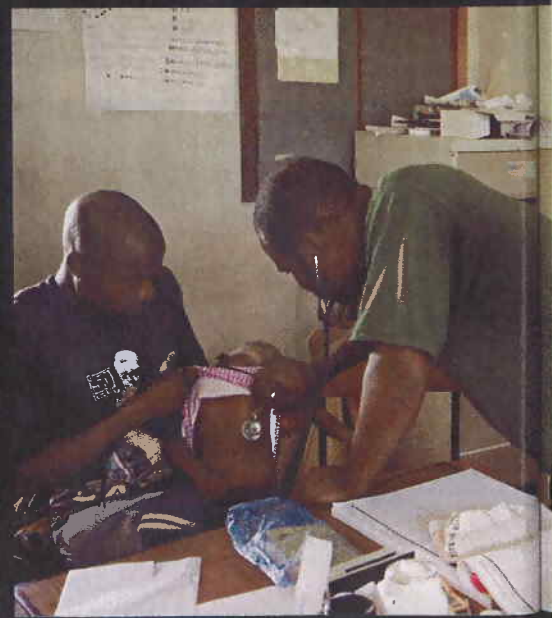
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RON HAVIVWE



ONE FATHER'S WORST DAY

Carrying his son Gift, sick with malaria, a frantic Patris Msunzi races through the halls of Dedza Hospital in Dedza, Malawi. Below left, Gift, in convulsions, lies with a depressor to keep him from biting his tongue; right, he's examined at a clinic near home.



BRINGING HOPE TO AFRICA

A FAMILY'S FIGHT FOR LIFE

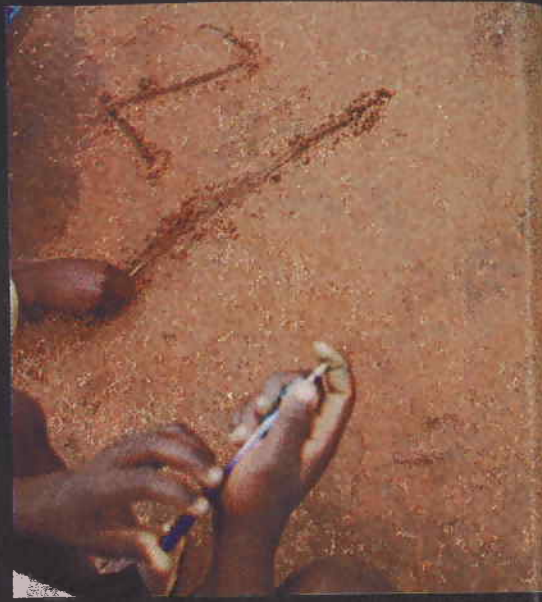
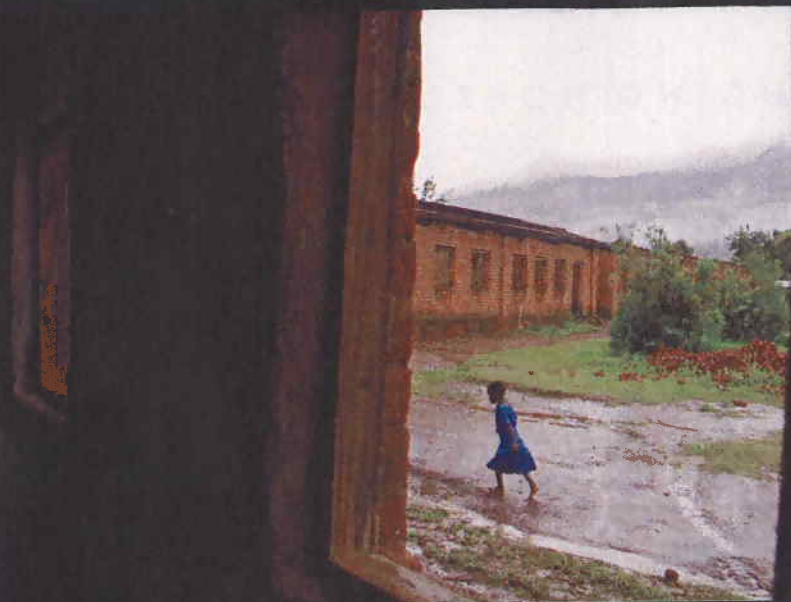
A father races to save his son as a new international effort seeks to help the desperately poor people of Malawi

One day in January, 3-year-old Gift Msunzi rose with the dawn, just as he always did. But on this Sunday morning life was just a bit sweeter. The flulike aches and fever that had troubled him the past two days had subsided, and now Gift was his exuberant self again. He raced to his best pal James's house, and the boys played soccer. Here in Gwengwere, a village in Malawi, they didn't have a regulation ball—or any ball for that matter. So Gift and James made do with a piece of refuse, which they kicked through a maze of muddy puddles left from the previous night's rain.

Photographs by **RON HAVIV**

M A L A W I Villagers commonly walk miles for water; even then, it's often unsanitary.





Then, at noon, Gift's mother, Esther, called him in for the day's first meal—a local dish called *sima*, made of cornmeal and water. Gift sat on the dirt floor of the home he shared with his parents and two brothers—a 10-ft.-by-10-ft. hut, with a thatched roof and not a stick of furniture. And that was when he started feeling sick again. "Pick me up, Mommy," he asked. Setting down Patrick, her 4-month-old, Esther took Gift in her arms. He was feverish. The aches had returned and his jaw grew so tense it locked into place. Frantic, Esther called for her husband, Patris, 28, who was working in the cornfields that provide the family's food and income, which averages less than \$100 a year. Carrying Gift on his back, Patris ran to the health clinic two miles away. There the lone staffer, not a doctor but a medical assistant, made an immediate and grim diagnosis: acute malaria, which in combination with the severe anemia Gift was suffering from can lead to organ failure, coma or even death.

Entering its seventh year of famine, Gwengwere, the home of 5,000 people in central Malawi, has been plagued by years of almost unimaginable depriva-

tion. But the people of Gwengwere have some reason for hope: It is one of dozens of "Millennium Villages" throughout Africa, at the center of a bold experiment conceived by economist and global antipoverty crusader Jeffrey Sachs and supported by celebrities like Angelina Jolie to give the world's poorest people the tools—such as access to medicine and clean drinking water—to fend for themselves (see box). Just weeks earlier, with a celebration attended by hundreds of villagers, seeds and fertilizer for every family had arrived. But the fruits of these labors are months if not years away, and Gift didn't have that long.

Patris had to get his son to the hospital instantly, but the nearest one was 19 miles away, and there was only one ambulance in the entire 100-sq.-mile district. Patris managed to hitch a ride with a group of U.N. aid workers—a stroke of fortune that, most anywhere in the developed world, would have sent Gift well on the way to recovery. But here the boy still faced overwhelming odds. The most successful cure for malaria is ACTs, short for Artemisinin Combination Therapies. The good news is that this





**LEARNING
AGAINST
ALL ODDS**

Scenes from a school
in Gwengwere, Gift's village:
Kids go to class in crumbling
buildings and do math
in the sand; in some grades
there are as few as 10
tattered textbooks for 150
students; their "blackboard"
—on a chipping wall.



drug cocktail costs a mere \$1.20 per patient; the tragedy is that it is not available to the vast majority of people in Malawi who need it. According to Sachs, the government is too poor to pay for the bulk order required by pharmaceutical companies. "Right now is the worst time for malaria, because it's hot and it's the rainy season," says Michael Keating, the U.N. representative for Malawi. "The combination of malaria and hunger is deadly."

Stretched out in back of the speeding SUV, Gift was slipping fast. "He stopped talking," his father says. "I called 'Gift, Gift,'"—the name Patris gave him because he believes every child is a gift from God. "He wouldn't answer. He was just crying." Then he went into convulsions. It was 3:30 p.m. when they finally made it to the hospital, but even then it took 15 minutes until a nurse, the only pediatric health care worker on staff, could see Gift. Now the little boy was frothing at the mouth, eyes rolling back in his head. The nurse gave him a shot of quinine, long the standard malaria treatment, but it was vir-

tually useless against Gift's advanced case. Still, quinine was all she had—that and some phenobarbital for the convulsions.

Patris held his hand as Gift lay in a simple bed in a bare room hooked to an IV, and later talked about how his middle child was known around the village for his puckish humor. "He liked to go up to adults and say, 'You can't fight me, I'm very brave,'" Patris recalls. Now his son was fighting for his life, and for a time it seemed he just might win. When Esther arrived at 6 p.m.—a villager had taken her on his bike to the highway, where she caught a bus—the convulsions had finally stopped. "We thought maybe he was getting better," Patris says. For 30 minutes, the boy lay peacefully. "He never talked. We didn't know it was the end."

By 6:30 p.m., Gift Msunzi, the very brave, was dead. The next afternoon that single district ambulance became available, and his parents brought him back to Gwengwere, the village air palpably heavy with grief, as neighbors wept for the lost boy. In Malawi the



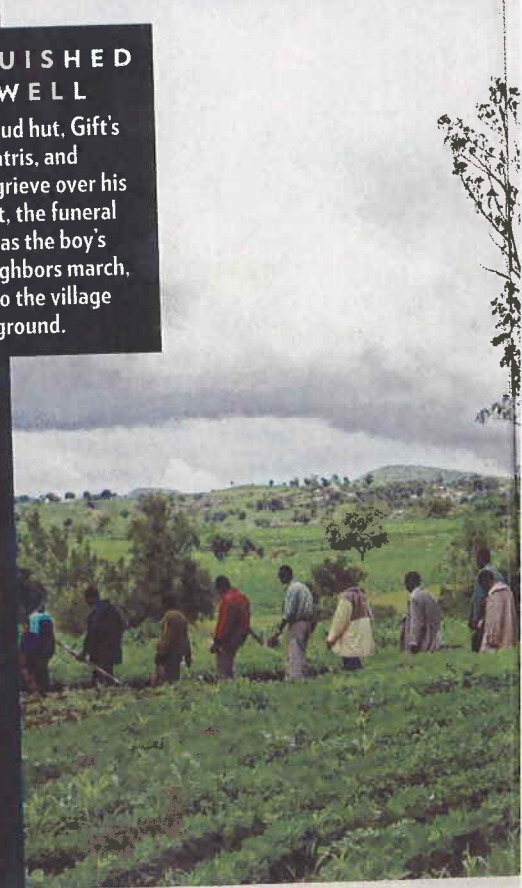
Millennium Promise codirector Jeffrey Sachs and supporter Angelina Jolie visit a Kenyan hospital.

average life expectancy is only 39 and the infant mortality rate one in nine, but no one could believe the impish Gift was gone forever. "He was a funny boy—he just liked to play," laments Likiana Chimchere, 32, mother of Gift's pal James and a family friend. For her this death opens an old wound: In 1997 she too lost a son to malaria. "He got sick one day, and the same day he died," she says softly. "Just like Gift."

Some women washed Gift's body and

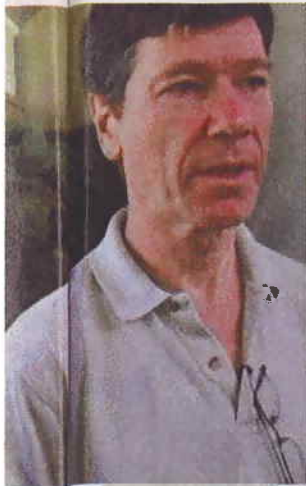


AN ANGUISHED FAREWELL
In their tiny mud hut, Gift's father, Patris, and grandmother grieve over his body. At right, the funeral procession, as the boy's family and neighbors march, single-file, to the village burial ground.



"IT IS GOD'S WISH THAT GIFT IS DEAD TODAY. I ACCEPT IT. BUT IT'S NOT EASY"

—PATRIS MSUNZI, AFTER HIS SON DIED OF MALARIA



VILLAGES OF HOPE

In 2000 the United Nations set a goal for the new millennium: to eradicate extreme poverty by 2025. It's an ambitious undertaking, given the massive numbers—40 percent of the world's population—2.6 billion people—that survive on \$2 or less a day. How do you stamp out poverty? According to Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, who runs an independent philanthropy called Millennium Promise, you do it by setting up thousands of Millennium Villages in some of the world's most impoverished areas—60 are in the works so far—and by getting private and corporate donors to provide the cash to help people on the ground obtain the necessary tools to improve their own lives. Those tools sound simple enough: seed and fertilizer, which can be six times more expensive in Africa than in the U.S.; improved

schools and a school meal for every child; insecticide-treated bed nets to prevent malaria; safe, clean drinking water. What makes the Millennium concept different from traditional antipoverty charities, says Sachs, is its stress on self-reliance—that a truly prosperous community is built from the bottom up by the people who live there. Above all, the project offers hope. "I think this is a turning point for us," says Cecilia Mkhota, a struggling maize farmer in Mwandama, Malawi, now a Millennium Village that has received shipments of fertilizer and seed. "In five years, I think this village will be exceptional."

For more information about the Millennium project, visit www.millenniumpromise.org. To see more of PEOPLE's report on Malawi, visit www.people.com/malawi.



laid him in his hut, covered in brilliantly colored cloths called kangas. All through the night a female chorus sang hymns over the boy, their haunting tones floating through the village. Relatives crammed the Msunzis' tiny home, and at times Esther broke down, taking refuge next door. Neighbors contributed any food, money or other goods they could spare.

On Jan. 17, just two days after Gift Msunzi kicked a makeshift ball through the village mud, Gwengwere prepared for his funeral. At around 1 p.m. the lanky village leader announced the time for final goodbyes. Gift's parents and close relatives touched the boy one last time. Two men arrived with a small wooden casket with a white cloth attached to it, and laid Gift inside. Then, according to custom, they tucked around him all his earthly belongings—two changes of clothing. Among the last group of mourners a number of children filed in, uncharacteristically mute, one of them Gift's buddy James, squeezing his mother's hand.

"Who will play with my son now?" Chimchere cried. "He was his only friend." Gift's brother Dixon, 7, fell to his knees in sobs, then flung himself against a wall, wailing uncontrollably. The 30-minute service took place in a nearby field. A Christian preacher read scripture and spoke fervently about "the river of death." Mourners trudged to the burial ground on a muddy, winding path through the corn. Amid reverent silence, several men lowered Gift into the earth, then took up hoes to fill the grave.

The Msunzis had but one more day to grieve, then Patris headed back to the fields. By summer, if the promises of the Millennium Villages are fulfilled, Gwengwere should have enough bed nets to ward off lethal mosquitoes; within a year, a rudimentary medical clinic stocked with ACTs. For Patris that hope is bittersweet. He'll never pass that clinic without seeing his boy's face or hearing his laugh. "I will always remember my son for his humor," he says, "and because I loved him so much."

By Richard Jerome. Mary Green in Malawi

TOP: MTV