

Contribute

New York

: the people and ideas of giving

The Contribute 200 Guide to Investor-Worthy Charities

SPECIAL REPORT:
CHARITY ACCOUNTABILITY

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Why less is getting to the needy

(RED) or Green?
Q&A with Cofounder
Bobby Shriver

**Holiday Gifts
For Good**

Donors' Lawyers:
Going in for the kill

The New Medicis

**Stepping
Up in Kabul**

November/December 2007

Product (RED)
Cofounder
Bobby Shriver

contents

VOLUME 02 : NUMBER 04

- 6 EDITOR'S NOTE
- 9 CONTRIBUTORS
- 12 LETTERS



74



frontlines

- 13 NUMBERS + BUZZ
- 14 60 SECONDS
Q&A with IQ2 Founder Robert Rosenkranz
- 16 TOP LINES

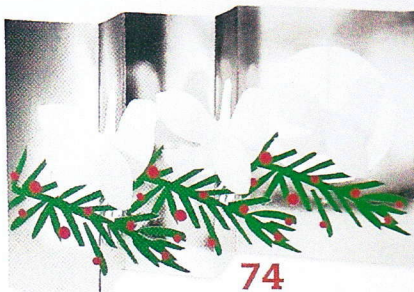
opinions

- 20 **BENEFIT SOCIETY AFTER THE BALL**
Partying like it's 1929
BY NELSON W. ALDRICH, JR.
- 22 **ADVOCATE CLASSWORK**
Fundraisers ought to be licensed to serve
BY NAOMI B. LEVINE AND CLAIRE GAUDIANI
- 25 **GIVING JACKIE O'S SECRET**
Having your cake and your charity, too
BY JOANNA L. KROTZ
- 28 **CAUSE&AFFECT WHAT DO YOU STAND FOR?**
Americans cool to cause branding
BY CAROL CONE

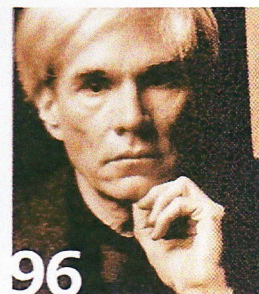


commitments

- 84 **PARTIES**
Autumn benefits that glowed
- 88 **THE ALTRUIST THE ART OF THE GIFT**
Giving's spiritual traditions
BY PETER HAYES
- 90 **OFF THE SHELF**
Six picks for season's readings
BY LAUREL MAURY
- 92 **THE SCENE CHARITABLE (MIS)TRUST**
Donor lawyers go in for the kill
BY MICHAEL GROSS
- 94 **STEPPING UP**
Battling darkness in war-torn Kabul
- 96 **BACK STORY ANDY WARHOL**
Discovering the iconoclast's soul
BY GINGER REDMON



74



96

the Contribute 200

- : introduction G2-3
- : gifts for good 74-75
- : 200 rankings G4-11
- : cards 77
- : measuring up G12-15
- : you're invited 78-81
- : hands on 73

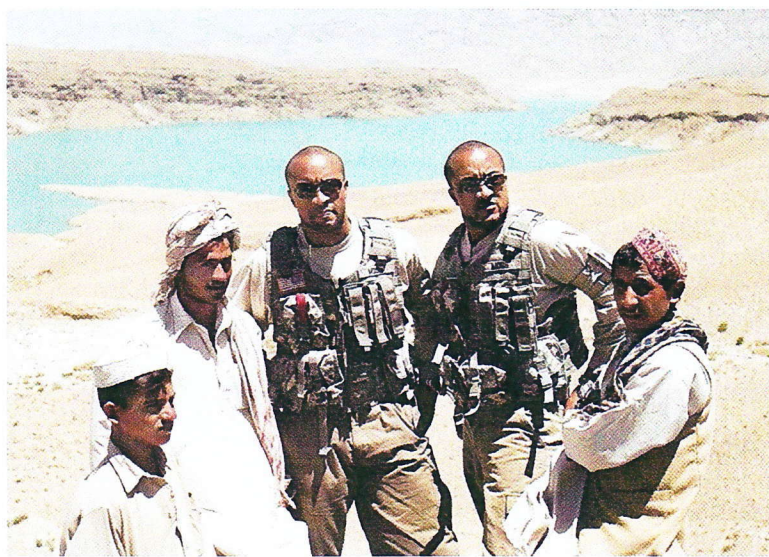


74

Kabul Winter

Battling darkness in the crossfire of war

Vance and Vincent Moss—36-year-old identical twins, New Yorkers, and the sons of a Vietnam War veteran—are known in Farsi as *doganagi*, same-face healers. The two U.S. Army Reserve doctors, acting as free agents on their own dime, just completed their second volunteer mission to the Red Zone outside Kabul to treat the innocent victims of the now five-year war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. In civilian life, Vance is a transplant surgeon on Long Island; Vince is a cardiothoracic surgeon in New Jersey. In October, Vance Moss told their story to freelance writer Sherry Amatenstein for *CONTRIBUTE*.



Vince and Vance Moss on their medical mission to Afghanistan.

Have a personal story to share from the frontlines of need? Tell us by sending an e-mail to editors@contributemedia.com. The best stories will be published in *Stepping Up*, which will appear in each issue of *CONTRIBUTE*.

When my brother and I were about eight, we found some old pictures of our father in his Army uniform; one photograph was taken of him in Vietnam. We also found a picture of him in his Boy Scout uniform, which had this sash with his merit badges pinned to it. We immediately got interested in joining the Boy Scouts and the military. We also both wanted to be doctors when we grew up. We were always competing with each other—over grades, girls, achievements. When we both got accepted to Penn State, we competed against each other for the next four years to see who could get into medical school. We both got in; we attended the same one.

Then we joined the Army Reserves together. I went

to Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas. Vince was sent to South Carolina. But the idea of going abroad didn't leave our minds. We'd be treating soldiers coming from Afghanistan who were telling us about the urgent need for surgical and medical care for children and other civilians over there. I'd always ask them about what was going on over in Afghanistan—you know, *How is it? How do you feel when you're there?* And most would talk about having to be in tents all day that were secured by 15-foot-high concrete walls—no different than a military base, except there's a war going on outside.

Then we started getting pictures of Afghani children with congenital disorders and mothers who, in some villages, were not allowed to see a doctor because of religious restrictions against men touching women. It was unbelievable, almost. So we decided that helping these people was our calling. In June 2005, we contacted our base commanders and asked for an official medical mission to Afghanistan. It was promising at first, but the State Department didn't want to risk the headline, "Two Doctors Killed in Afghanistan." So we got in touch with the American Embassy in Afghanistan, and eventually we were connected to a nonprofit called the Northwest Medical Group. It's an organization of missionaries based in Kabul who were helping with the reconstruction, teaching English, building clinics, and providing basic medical care.

Kabul is in the so-called Green Zone, where the insurgency and the level of violence is relatively low. But in the Red Zone, it's extremely dangerous. There are no American and civilian forces to protect you there. It's just poppy fields, drug lords, and the Pakistan/Afghanistan border, which is now one of the most dangerous places in this region of the war. In the villages, we were surrounded by urban warfare.

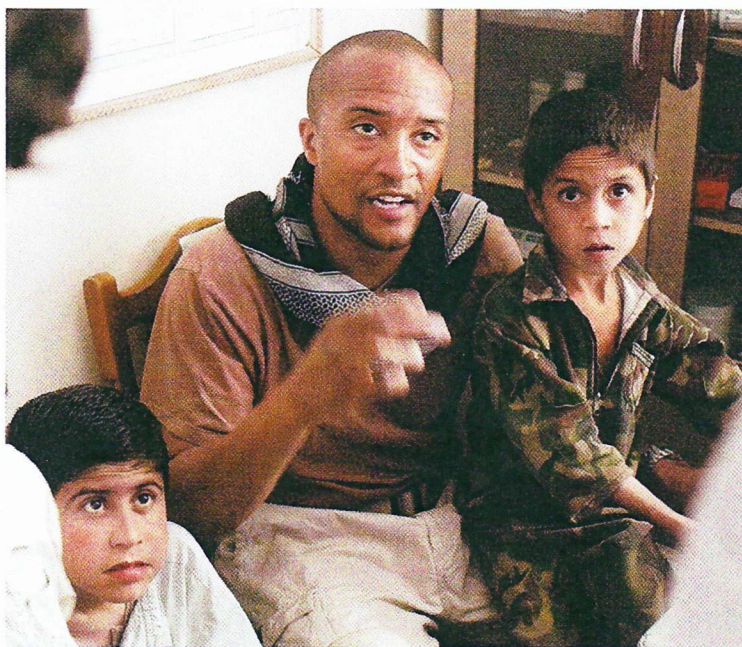
PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY VINCE AND VANCE MOSS; CARTOGRAPHY: JIM MCMAHON



Afghanistan has been caught up in war for decades. There aren't any goods and services, just chaos and corruption. At one of the Army hospitals in Kabul, I would examine a patient, go to wash my hands, and there would be no soap, no gloves, no gauze, no oxygen for anesthesia, no toilet paper—and this is a hospital to which the American government has given millions and millions of dollars for reconstruction. Yet next door to the Army hospital was a warehouse full of antibiotics, medications, and equipment—everything you need in a hospital, all boxed up with the U.S. government seal. But these supplies were not making it to the hospitals; they were being siphoned off. When we asked if we could have some of the supplies, they told us we'd have to pay for them ourselves. Eventually, when we examined a patient and needed a standard X-ray, we would have to go downstairs to the radiology department and take money out of our own pockets to get these individuals X-rays.

Out in the Red Zone, we had to keep reminding ourselves how dangerous it was. We hired our own security force, about seven members of the regular Afghanistan army with whom we established trust. They were our translators, our guides, our security, our intelligence. They were our life. In the Red Zone, the enemy does not have a face. There is no front line. When you walk into a village, you're just hoping that there is not a bomb in one of those huts or a sniper in one of those mountains ready to clip you. There was never a time when we were all sleeping. There was always somebody awake.

In the villages, a quarter of the patients we treated were mine victims, with blown-off legs and disfigured faces. Many had posttraumatic stress syndrome. We saw diseases from the common flu to diaphragmatic hernias to neck masses. We even sent one little boy, Khati, to a New York specialist for an operation. At one point, we saw over 400 patients, from two weeks old to 80 years old, in one 15-hour day. There was no running water, no electricity, no sense of civilization. We would sometimes do surgery in a tent by the light



of a cell phone. We sterilized our equipment with water heated over a fire.

After that first trip, we came home and had no plans to return. But the U.S. Embassy contacted us and insisted: there were hundreds of patients waiting to see us. My brother and I decided to help fund a clinic in Jugdelae, on the outskirts of Kabul, which Northwest Medical was building.

In the Red Zone, you can go for miles without seeing a hospital, so even the little makeshift clinic that we have there is, to them, everything. We plan to build more clinics there. We can't change the world. We can't change the whole system over there. But we can do something. ▀

Sherry Amatenstein is a New York freelance writer.

Vince Moss (above right), with Afghani children in Kabul; two young mothers and their children (above) outside a village in the Red Zone of Afghanistan.