



## Blind mother seeing anew thanks to Hub 'miracle'

By Christine McConville | Monday, August 22, 2011 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | [Local Coverage](#)

An ecstatic 35-year-old mother of three is back home in Zambia today and no longer blind after miraculous cutting-edge surgery in Boston restored her eyesight, allowing her to see her children for the first time in three years.



Photo by Christopher Evans

"This is a miracle, a big miracle," Mercy Muzmara told the Herald last week in an examination room at Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary. "I used to think miracles were stories in the Bible, but they are real. One happened to me."

Muzmara, a preschool teacher and a recent widow, lost her sight after a severe reaction to an antibiotic fused her eyelids to her eyeballs. After doctors in Zambia told her there was no hope, a U.S. physician there put her in touch with Mass. Eye and Ear.

Now, thanks to the button-sized, plastic artificial cornea inserted into her left eye, which extends from her inner eye out past her eyelid, Muzmara can finally see again.

The lead surgeon, Dr. James Chodosh, agreed that Muzmara's restored vision was a miracle, but for different reasons.

"It wouldn't have happened without all the people involved in it," said Chodosh, who spent six hours in the operating room, along with a retina surgeon and a glaucoma specialist. He singled out, among others, Mass. Eye and Ear colleague and inventor of this artificial cornea, Dr. Claes Dohlman.

"He worked on this device for decades," Chodosh said, adding Muzmara also deserves a lot of credit. "She was extremely brave to come all this way."

Muzmara's ordeal began three years ago when she broke out in hives after taking an over-the-counter antibiotic. Scar tissue soon developed on her eyeballs and eyelids, fusing them.

"It's like she was burned inside and out," Chodosh said of her condition.

An avid reader, Muzmara could no longer see and struggled to raise her three young children. When her husband died last year, her plight became dire. "It was very difficult," she said. "I wouldn't know if my child's T-shirt was dirty, and I couldn't see if their hair was messy."

As time went on, Muzmara became depressed.

"I was closed up in my room," she recalled. "I was always staying indoors."

After the death of her husband, a Pentecostal Christian pastor, she moved in with his parents, because she couldn't raise her children on her own anymore.

A Zambian doctor told her nothing could be done to restore her sight. But Dr. P. Jeff Colquhoun, a Michigan physician on a church mission in Zambia, told her about Mass. Eye and Ear and its artificial corneas.

When Colquhoun returned to Michigan, he and his fellow parishioners raised the money to cover Muzmara's travel expenses.

And so Muzmara, accompanied by her friend Charity, left Zambia for the United States last month.

They stayed in the Quincy home of an anonymous benefactor working with Hospitality Homes, a non-profit that connects cash-strapped sick people with Bostonians who have a spare bedroom or two.

"These are people who had never seen a refrigerator," director Caryl Goodman said about Muzmara and her friend. "How are they supposed to pay for a hotel room for a month?"

The operation and aftercare cost about \$50,000, most of which was paid for by a philanthropic fund.

Maggi Alexander with Imaginations Group, who escorted Muzmara to her various appointments, took her to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum soon after the operation.

"So, so beautiful," Muzmara said.

Sometime today, Muzmara will be back in Zambia, visiting her husband's grave and again laying eyes on her daughters Patience, 13, and Blessing, 7, and son Isaac, 8. "I'm going to hug them," she said, "and lift them in my arms."

"I want to mend people," added Muzmara, who wants to follow in her late husband's pastoral footsteps. "Orphans, widows, the aged, there are so many people out there who need help, and I've got compassion."

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