

Ascot doctor's heartwarming reunion with African woman whose life he saved

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BY [MARY NAYLOR](#)

Dr Keith Thomson, 68, saved the life of 16-year-old Catherine Conteh in 1993 when she was unable to pay \$100 for life-saving cesarean during a four day labour



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Catherine Conteh and Dr Keith Thomson

A doctor from [Ascot](#) was delighted to play host to a woman whose life he saved 23 years ago.

Dr Keith Thomson, 68, saved the life of 16-year-old Catherine Conteh in 1993 when she was unable to pay \$100 for life-saving cesarean during a four day labour.

Dr Thomson, an anaesthetist, was working with Mercy Ships, a floating hospital charity, when the cancellation of an operation left him with a free afternoon in Sierra Leone.

He decided to pay a visit to the Princess Christian Maternity Hospital in Freetown.

He said: “In the labour ward was a young woman on a bed in great distress.

“They said “she’s going to die, she needs a cesarean, she’s been in labour for four days””

In Sierra Leone if you are unable to pay for your surgery you cannot have it, making Mercy Ships essential in the region.

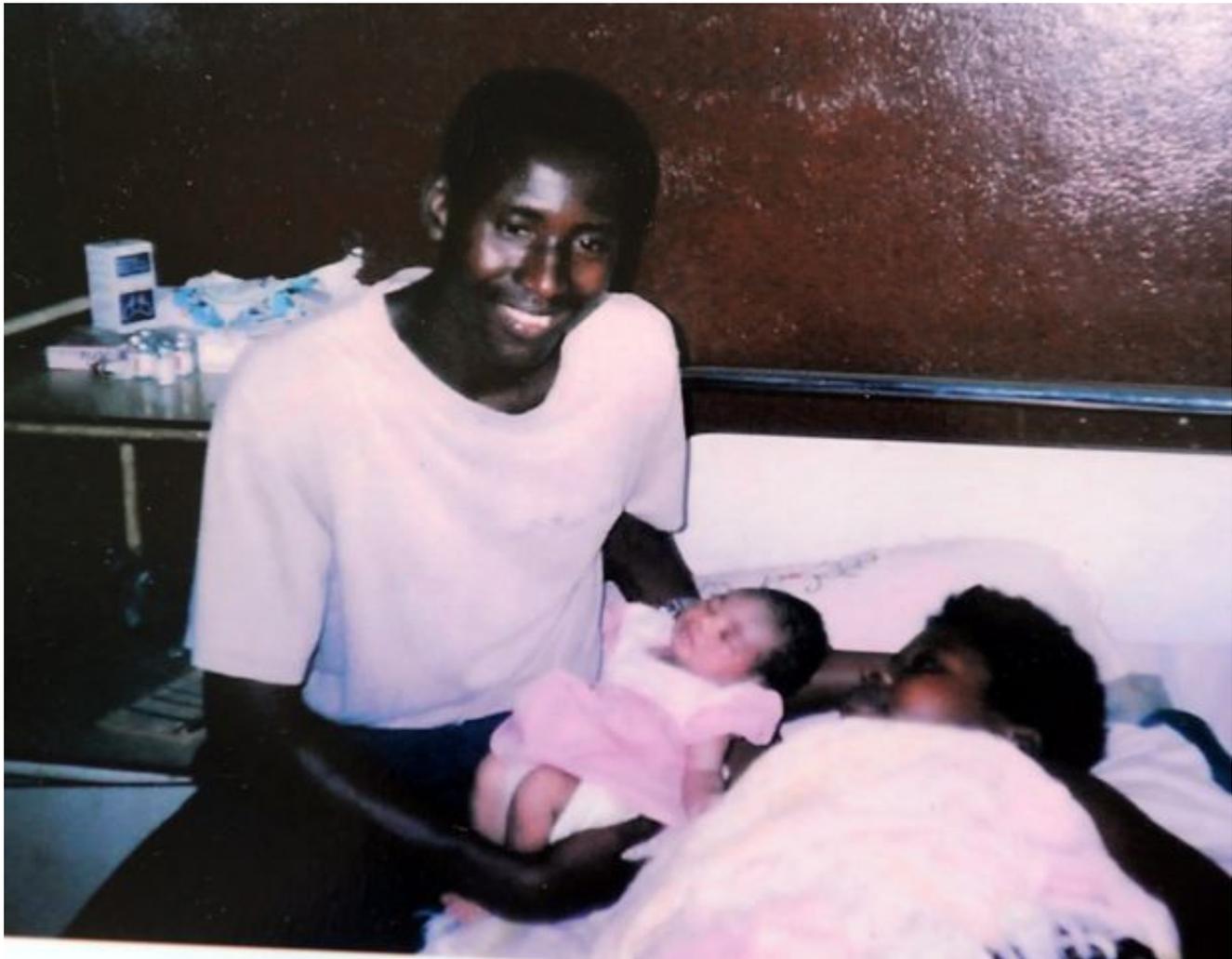
At the time a cesarean cost \$100, the equivalent of a poor family’s annual income at the time in Sierra Leone.

Dr Thomson paid the sum, saving not only Catherine’s life but that of her unborn daughter, Regina.

Mrs Conteh said: “It was a feeling I will never forget, when you are in such a difficult situation, you know you are going to die if you don’t have help.

“Someone from somewhere just came along and gave me a second chance.”

Since that day Mrs Conteh and her family have kept in touch with the man who save their lives and gave them another shot at life.



Augustine Conteh, holding new born Regina and Catherine after her cesarean in 1993

Dr Thomson knew a nurse who was flying out to Freetown 18 months later and he asked

her to keep an eye out for Mrs Conteh and by chance she stumbled across the same church Mrs Conteh went to and the priest put them in touch.

Mrs Conteh said: "That's the amazing part of the whole story.

"People help out people but they never get in touch, [Dr Thomson] didn't just help to save my life he ensured I was in a safe place."

Dr Thomson, or Uncle Keith as he became, continued to help the family as best he could, through their moves to Guinea and then to Ghana and finally to Australia where both Mrs Conteh and Regina, now 23, have worked to become nurses.

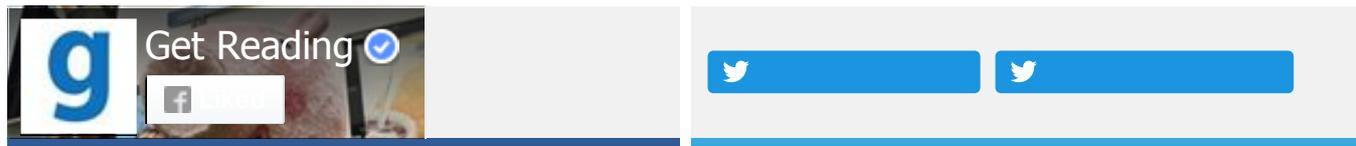
When Mrs Conteh's family, Re

She said: “Regina, she’s completing her degree in nursing this year, [her degree] means so much, she grew up with the story to motivate her.”

Since moving to Australia, Mrs Conteh has given birth to a second child, Derek, named after Dr Thomson’s late father.

Mrs Conteh said: “I also had a cesarean for Derek but this time around I was in a well equipped hospital, I knew exactly what was happening and the medical team knew the situation.

While she was in Britain, Mrs Conteh also visited Dr Thomson’s mother Jean (90), on Saturday, April 16, they both flew out to Sierra Leone to visit her relatives still living there.



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