

# Ex-basketball player helps African victims of AIDS

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bring him closer to pursuing his life's goal.

But he was stranded at Kennedy Airport when a friend's offer of lodging fell through. To get by, Bekale said, he lived with other Africans in New York City's Brooklyn borough and peddled knockoff watches before coming to Washington, where a family took him in and sent him to high school in the Virginia suburbs.

He left for Penn State on a basketball scholarship in fall 1998. His parents died not long after he started classes — his father the following June and his mother in March 2000.

After earning a bachelor's degree in business administration in 2002, Bekale focused on creating Hoops4Africa, a follow-up to his efforts while in school to help improve the quality of life in Africa.

In college, he sent his teammates' used basketball shoes to Gabon for the players there. Bekale also raised several thousand dollars to help provide clean drinking water in his native Tchibanga.

Hoops4Africa is partnering with the Land O'Lakes dairy company, which works with farmers in sub-Saharan Africa. The company has a regional office in Kenya and is helping Bekale with logistics on the ground, said Tom

Verdoorn, a vice president of the Arden Hills, Minn.-based company.

Land O'Lakes will supplement Hoops4Africa's message about HIV/AIDS prevention with a pointer of its own about the importance of good nutrition — including milk and other dairy products.

"Getting the right kinds of nutrition into people afflicted with the HIV/AIDS virus is a very important component of their well-being," Verdoorn

said in an interview.

What Bekale is trying to accomplish is not unique. Celebrities often help raise awareness about AIDS, other illnesses and charitable causes. But knowing firsthand how young Africans admire American basketball players, Bekale and his supporters say what he is trying to do can save lives.

"The (AIDS) problem is so enormous. It's a pandemic," said Congressman Donald

Payne, who helped Hoops4Africa qualify for tax-exempt status. "I think that there's room for many organizations to spring up and try and get the word out to young people."

On the Net:

Hoops4Africa:

[www.hoops4africa.org](http://www.hoops4africa.org)

United Nations Joint Program on AIDS:

[www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)

## Drinking too much water could be a dangerous thing

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all over the natural wonder warning of the danger.

This year, the once-unrecognized problem made medical headlines after a study showed more than 10 percent of runners in the 2002 Boston Marathon finished the race with below-normal sodium levels, a condition called hyponatremia.

The reason? They drank too much water during the hours they were running, so much that they flushed sodium from their bodies, dangerously upsetting their electrolyte balance.

When that happens, water enters the body's cells, which then swell. If swollen brain cells start pressing against the skull, the result is brain damage, paralysis, coma and sometimes death.

"We observed that hyponatremia occurs in a substantial fraction of marathon runners and can be severe," the authors of the study, published in the New England Journal of Medicine in April, concluded. "It has emerged

as an important cause of race-related death and life-threatening illness among marathon runners."

Hyponatremia did in fact kill one runner that year—a 28-year-old woman who was struggling badly the last six miles. Suffering nausea, fatigue and muscle weakness-symptoms similar to dehydration—she assumed that was the problem, chugged 16 more ounces of fluids, then collapsed and died.

Her blood sodium levels had plunged to 113 millimoles per liter of blood. Hyponatremia begins to occur at sodium levels below 135, and becomes life-threatening at about 120.

When Carol Tufts got to Tucson Medical Center the day she collapsed recently, her sodium level had plunged to 122.

"She was zoned, completely out of it. She was on her way down," said Tufts' daughter, Judy Rodin, who found her mother that morning during a routine stop and called 911. Obviously, at 80, Carol

Tufts was no marathon runner or Grand Canyon hiker. But she faithfully drank about 10 glasses of water a day, practicing what she thought was a good habit. That morning, when she felt so bad, she downed four glasses of water quickly, thinking hydration would help what felt like an irregular heartbeat. Tufts was also on medication for hypertension and osteoporosis, and also suffered mild hypothyroidism—a condition that can exacerbate sodium loss.

"We see this frequently, especially in elderly people. The cause usually is all the water they're drinking, combined with the medications they may be taking," said Dr. Ramakrishnan Subbureddi, a geriatric specialist who treated Tufts during her rehabilitation.

Now restricted to six cups of fluids a day, Tufts has recovered, and is more clearheaded than she has been in months, both she and her daughter say.

"I'm drying out, so to speak," Tufts laughed.

## Books lead to discussion on loss of friendship among four women

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Bethesda, Maryland "But just because you're a guy, you don't always know how to talk about it."

Either way, finding a way to make peace isn't always possible.

Though she misses her friend, Eng says she has no wish to reconcile because of the emotional trauma involved. "Now in my 30s, I've realized it's OK to have friends on different levels," she says. "They don't have to

promise to be there for the rest of my life."

There are those, however, who do feel the need to reach out to friends they've once written off.

Amalie Young was so troubled by a 2001 breakup with one of her best friends, who lives in Oregon, that she sat down a few months ago to write her a letter—in part to apologize for, as she sees it, being too controlling of her friend.

"I tried to make it as much

about me—that I hadn't been a good friend," says Young, a 30-year-old former reporter who recently finished culinary school and is looking for a job in New York.

Her friend wrote back a few weeks later—and they've since spoken on the phone.

"The weight of not speaking to her was lifted," says Young, who hopes to visit her friend this summer. "The door's now open to communicate."

Offill says several people who've read "The Friend Who Got Away" have told her they'd like to reconcile with a friend. "A few people," she says, "are even sending the book to the friend they're no longer close to as an olive branch."

On the Net:

[www.friendwhogotaway.com](http://www.friendwhogotaway.com)

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