

Chris Austin

Songwriting Contest

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Entries must be received,
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Questions, e-mail:
laurie.hayes@wilkescc.edu
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EMERGENT
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→ FILMMAKER

WORTH THE WALK

DIRECTOR DOCUMENTS FIVE AFRICAN
WOMEN'S JOURNEY TO HOSPITAL



A severe condition in which a hole develops between a woman's rectum or bladder and her vagina, *obstetric fistula* results from obstructed labor and leads to chronic incontinence and sometimes nerve damage and infertility. This occurs predominantly in developing countries, due to insufficient obstetric care, and it affects at least two million women worldwide. Sufferers are often ostracized by their villages and even their own families. Mary Olive Smith's first feature-length documentary, *A Walk to Beautiful*, chronicles five young African women as they travel to Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, seeking free treatment for their debilitating condition.

Smith scouted, produced, directed and served as one of five cinematographers on this project. Her team shot the film mainly over four months, during which the largely female crew towed equipment long distances in baking temperatures. Finding subjects was difficult, too. "There's a lot of shame associated with this condition," Smith says. "Word of mouth ultimately led us to the women we followed."

Smith says her biggest challenge was balancing the women's tender stories with the necessary medical context: "The more information we included, the more the women's stories risked being diluted. [But] I was determined not to let the audience leave without understanding the complexity of this condition."

The International Documentary Association gave *A Walk to Beautiful* its top Feature Documentary Award in 2007, and *Walk* received limited theatrical release this year. Now available on DVD—and eligible for a 2008 Oscar—the film continues to screen at universities, churches and other venues. But most importantly, it has spurred donations to the Fistula Hospital and helped push a bill through Congress to assist with maternal child health globally. "I felt great responsibility for these women and their health," Smith says. "They trusted me with their stories. They called me 'mother.'" **JULIE JACOBS**

MARY OLIVE SMITH HOMETOWN: Winston-Salem, N.C.
FILM: *A Walk to Beautiful* **FOR FANS OF:** *Born into Brothels*, *The Business of Being Born*



James Buchanan ★ **ROB SCHNEIDER**
Buchanan is always a popular pick for worst president ever.
Thus, he shall be portrayed by the worst actor ever.