

The following are entries from the blog of Jessica King, who is serving onboard the Africa Mercy for two years as a dietician. To read more of Jessica's blog, visit www.nonsensealmode.blogspot.com

February 28, 2011



I started my job today by helping set up the hospital on the Africa Mercy. Everything had been packed away for the sail from South Africa to Sierra Leone so we are cleaning and basically building a hospital! So far the rest of this week most of the hospital staff will be helping set up the hospital and preparing for screening day which is in a week.

It feels so weird to be here on the ship; it doesn't feel like we're in Africa. I feel such culture shock. The ship is another world far away from Freetown. It is controlled and clean, with familiar food, consistent electricity, and most of the comforts of home. Which is wonderful, but some reason it is hard to get used to after our experience living in Freetown. I'm getting acclimated quickly though; I only got here yesterday and I already feel like I've been here a week!

March 4, 2011

So much has happened in the past few days. I've jumped right into my job this week. One part of my job is going to be working with the infant feeding program, making sure the cleft lip/palate babies who come to us gain enough weight to qualify for surgery.

On Tuesday I went with the infant feeding program leader to Ola During Hospital, a maternity and paediatrics hospital just around the corner from the port. It was dimly lit inside, and the wards were large rooms with patients lying next to each other in iron beds. It reminded me of how they depict hospitals in WWII movies. There is a clinic for malnourished infants started by UNICEF at the hospital. They have an inpatient center as well as outpatient and a weekly clinic. All is free to children under the age of 5 as part of a government program in Sierra Leone providing free healthcare for pregnant women and children under the age of 5.

There were so many textbook examples of severe malnutrition in the patients there. Something I never thought I would see firsthand when I was studying in school. One thing is certain, I am going to do and see things here as a dietitian that I would never see or do anywhere else. It's both exciting and overwhelming. I am praying that God will equip me to do my job very well and show what I need to concentrate on and do each day.



Ola During Hospital in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter!

Visit facebook.com/mercyshipsaustralia and twitter.com/mercyshipsau



BRISBANE 2011 FLOODS



photo by Jo Lencz

There has been an unexpected silver lining in the aftermath of the recent floods and cyclone that has affected large parts of the Australian continent over the last couple of months. There was an outpouring of compassion as thousands rallied to support those who had suffered the loss of loved ones, homes and livelihoods. People from all walks of life showed up with shovels, buckets, supplies and in some cases, trucks, bobcats and backhoes. It was a remarkable heartwarming response to see complete strangers coming to the aid of those suffering devastating loss.

There was no doubt those affected appreciated the help. But those offering the help also valued from the experience. Although many went home weary and covered in mud, there was also a sense of wellbeing from knowing they had helped a fellow human being in their time of need. Something deep inside is touched when we help someone in need.

As we approach Mother's Day it is only right we honour our mothers here in Australia, but we also want to highlight the special health needs of the struggling mothers of Africa. The alarming statistics reveal a woman living in sub-Saharan Africa has a 1 in 16 chance of dying in pregnancy, compared to a 1 in 13,300 risk for a woman in Australia.

PS. Pregnancy and the birth of a child should be a joyful occasion, but mothers in Africa approach this time of life with trepidation as one in sixteen die in the process. Join with us this Mother's Day to improve the life expectancy of mothers in Africa who live under this foreboding cloud.

Mercy Ships is committed to improving this terrible statistic by addressing both the pre- and postnatal aspects of childbirth. Prevention is just as important as treatment and so Mercy Ships is stepping up efforts to better educate health care professionals and conduct childbirth clinics so as to prevent childbirth complications happening in the first place.

As with past Mother's Days, Mercy Ships is again asking Aussie mums (and dads) to dig deep and join us as we mend the broken bodies and heal the broken hearts of our distressed sisters in the developing world! Your donation can help change a mother's life from one of hopeless misery to one of joyful optimism...and you too will be touched in the process!

May God bless you as you join us in "Mending Bodies and Healing Hearts" this Mother's Day.

Gary Regazzoli
Chief Executive Officer
Mercy Ships Australia



BRINGING RENEWED JOY THIS MOTHER'S DAY

Yes, I would like to give a life-changing donation to Mercy Ships

Enclosed is my donation (Cheque, Money Order, Credit Card) of:

\$25 \$50 \$100 \$200 \$ _____

I would like a Mercy Ships representative to come and give a presentation to our club, group, church, school

Please send me information on how to leave a gift to Mercy Ships in my Will

Please remove my name from your mailing list

Thank you for changing lives with Mercy Ships

Please return to: **Mercy Ships Australia** PO Box 1080 Caloundra QLD 4551
Phone: 07 5437 2992 Fax: 07 5437 2488 Email: msaust@mercyships.org.au

CREDIT / DEBIT CARD GIVING
Credit Card Number

Name on Card: _____

Expiry Date: ____/____/____ Signature: _____

Please credit donation to:

General Fund - For those who do not need a tax receipt

Relief Fund - For those who may need a tax receipt

(Donations over \$2.00 to Relief Fund are Tax Deductable)

I would like to make this my regular donation

Monthly Payment Yes

Australian Charity Number: 097037922



GIVING MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO PEOPLE BORN INTO POVERTY WITH LITTLE OR NO HOPE OF RECEIVING THE CARE REQUIRED TO LEAD NORMAL HEALTHY LIVES

ARRIVAL IN SIERRA LEONE

by Tim Tretheway, captain of the *Africa Mercy*

On 27th February we arrived in the country of Sierra Leone in the city of Freetown. Celebrations awaited us on the dock and that morning we weren't even too sure whether we would be able to dock there. The previous day we had heard that there was a strike at the port due to another company taking over on the 1st of March. Our aim was to get in before that, but hadn't planned on strike action which meant there were no linesmen to take our lines to tie us up. Fortunately our advance team had a "deckie" as part of the team so he quickly gathered volunteers from the Mercy Teams and Gateway that we already had situated in Freetown and gave them a quick lesson on how to tie a ship up. It worked and we arrived safely with the help of the two pilots to guide us in.

It was a joyous occasion; the children had made Sierra Leone flags in school and the police band played and the baton twirler twirled and even balanced his baton on his head. Then we had the great moment as our two Sierra Leonian crew members walked down the gangway with their country's flag and at the bottom a child waited to receive it. What was special was



Africa Mercy captain, Tim Tretheway (center) with the two pilots who helped guide the ship in to Freetown's harbour.



The view of Freetown, Sierra Leone from the deck of the *Africa Mercy* as it sailed into port.

With your donation and support we can secure the future work of Mercy Ships

Send your gift today!

- \$25 can support a patient for one day onboard the *Africa Mercy*.
- \$50 can provide dental repair for one person.
- \$100 can deliver an eye operation giving sight to the blind.
- \$400 can cover a Life-Changing Surgery for one desperate person.

mercEnews
Would you like to receive our e-newsletter, *mercEnews*? To sign up for the monthly update, please fill in your email address and mail this section back to us.
Email Address: (Your name and address are on the reverse side of this section)

that child had received a surgery onboard one of our previous ships, the *Anastasis*, when he was a baby (read Joseph's story to the right). He was so proud as he carried that flag. Our Managing Director and his wife were received by the Minister of Health and Sanitation, who gave a speech to welcome us.

What was special was that child had received a surgery onboard one of our previous ships, the *Anastasis*, when he was a baby

We are so looking forward to serving in this country and to see the changes since my wife Sharon's last visit in 2001. Already Sharon walked down town last weekend and enjoyed interacting with those in the market. They seemed very respectable and never pushed to get you to buy things; if you said no, they accepted it. I think we are going to enjoy it here.

www.trethewaylines.blogspot.com



People line the streets waiting to be seen on Screening Day

REVISITING JOSEPH



Former Mercy Ships patient Joseph Fofanah raises his nation's flag at the *Africa Mercy*'s arrival ceremony in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Looking very sharp in his Boy Scout uniform, nine-year-old Joseph Fofanah stepped up to accept his country's flag. Then he marched crisply to place it in the stand, saluted, and retreated smartly. It was appropriate that this young man participated in the ceremony to welcome the arrival of the *Africa Mercy* to Sierra Leone.

Mercy Ships played a very important role in Joseph's life. He was born with a cleft palate and cleft lip. "He was having a problem," said his mother, Isatu. "Any liquid we fed him would come back out his nose."

This serious birth defect negatively impacts the lives of many African children. Fortunately,

Isatu realised that her son needed a medical procedure to repair the cleft. However, the cost of the surgery was more than she and her husband could afford. "But the pastor and the doctor who delivered Joseph told me not to worry," said Isatu. "A *Mercy Ship* is just on the way."

Joseph had his first surgery in 2002, when he was almost four months old, and he received a second surgery the following year. He has no memory of his problem or of his *Mercy Ships* experiences, but the success of these procedures is evident in his brilliant smile.

Today, Joseph is a happy, active fourth-grader. His favourite subject is mathematics, which may have something to do with his ambition to be a banker one day. An avid football (soccer) enthusiast, he is the goalie on his school team, and enjoys playing with his younger brother, Joshua.



Joseph is flanked by Dr. Gary Parker and the *Africa Mercy*'s captain, Tim Tretheway.

Scouting is very popular in Sierra Leone, and Joseph is a five-year member of Boy Scout Team 3. "I really love to march," he says, and he's looking forward to camping with his troop.

When asked what he thought about being onboard the *Africa Mercy*, he grinned and exclaimed, "I'm excited, and I really want to stay here!"



Dr. Gary Parker, with his wife Susan, greets his former patient Joseph, who was accompanied to the arrival ceremony by his mother Isatu and brother Joshua.