



We'd like to start by saying thank you and we're sorry. Thanks for the interest that you show in what God is doing through the work here and asking about our newsletter and e-mails. We're so sorry for being a bit less "in touch" through writing. Having three children has made us look around and ask the question, "Where does the time go?"

***The Needy Never Take a Vacation***

16 Feb 06—Monrovia, Liberia, 2 days before our week long "Mid-outreach Break"

9:00—An elderly lady is waiting in line at our dental clinic and has had her jaw joint locked open for four months. I anesthetize the area to relocate her jaw but to no success. I call the ship's chief surgeon and ask if a general anesthesia might be enough to relax the muscles and relocate it. He states that even after one week it is usually impossible to relocate the jaw, much less four months. She will require a two to three hour surgery (with two surgeons working simultaneously). The ship's surgery schedule has been filled only days before this. She will have to wait, unable to close her mouth, for over a year until the Africa Mercy visits Liberia in 2007.

9:30—An eight year old boy, Arthur, comes in with a very swollen face and pus draining out two small holes in his cheek. It is a scene not too unfamiliar; most likely osteomyelitis. Yes, our newsletter dawns the term again. Another dead jaw bone due to one decayed baby tooth.

9:45—A seven year old boy, Albert, arrives with a fractured jaw. The worst I've seen yet, even on an adult. The back portion of his jaw is so displaced that it sits in the middle of his mouth where his tongue should be. He cannot close his mouth and has a towel into which he drools the excess salivation caused by the fracture. It is Thursday. He was injured in a bicycle accident on Sunday.



***Albert's Fractured Jaw (this should be a continuous line on the bottom as you look at it from the left to the right).***

I am frustrated. It was a flexible week in our operating room and had any of these patients come in one or two days earlier, they might have had the chance to have surgery on the ship immediately. Why did they have to come in all together today? I call the ship to "feel out" the surgery schedule for the rest of that day and the next day. Our operating room supervisor is now more frustrated than I am. They've been working 60 plus hour weeks. She's slightly angry with me because she often feels pressured under such intense need. I'm slightly angry with her making me feel guilty for trying to get these patients some help.

I send Arthur to a local hospital for IV antibiotics.

This is very difficult to do emotionally, as I know they do not usually get the doses regularly enough to keep the levels high enough in their blood stream. I call the elderly lady and give her a slip of paper she can use to get a ticket for the next

Mercy Ships screening. Now I have to pray she won't be required to pay a bribe for the ticket she deserves.

I return to the ship that evening not knowing what has happened with Albert, the boy with the fractured jaw. If it is fractured in only one place, I will be able to repair it with surgery, but I still don't know if we will get that surgery slot on the day before vacation. As I pull the car onto the dock and turn off the ignition, I sit still for a moment and a thought comes to mind. Why were the O.R. supervisor and I frustrated, because we couldn't get these patients help, or because it was the day before vacation? Had we let our jobs become just jobs? We have to set boundaries for ourselves, of course, or the needs would completely consume us. But our own schedules and expectations may not *always* be one of those boundaries. Our work is part of our ministry, our service, our worship. The needy never take a vacation. We are here to serve these people, and it might not always fit our personal agendas.

Thankfully, I was able to repair Albert's fracture the next morning and before his surgery, the O.R. supervisor, Ans, came up to me and said that God had given her a slap on the back at the ship's community meeting the night before. I had the kids, but Kristin had been to the meeting and said I would have liked the message given by that week's speaker. Ans proceeded to tell me that part of his message was that we cannot let our work on board become just a job. I guess God was really trying to speak clearly to both of us. I was able to operate on Arthur two weeks later. ***"This is definitely the neediest place we've ever been"***

The elderly lady I mentioned earlier—you might be surprised (or insulted) to know I am calling her elderly if I told you she was fifty, but I decided to use the term as a recent release of WHO statistics for Liberia show the average life span to be forty years. 246 out of 1000 children (nearly 1 in 4) will not live to see their fifth birthday.

"This is definitely the neediest place we've ever been." These words spoken directly to me from the ship's Chief Medical Officer and head surgeon Gary Parker, who has been working on this vessel now for 18 years. To hear



***Keith with Emmanuel, a patient with osteomyelitis that affected both sides of his jaw.***

these words spoken from his mouth about the nation of Liberia is almost a greater picture of the problem than reading the statistics or even seeing it with my own eyes.

I wanted to describe to you the patients that we have seen this trip to Liberia with unique, severe problems. Unfortunately (or maybe fortunately for you) the list is now just too long. I will post the descriptions to our website under newsletters if you'd like to read them. But I'd like to ask you to please take one day each week to pray for our patients. The treatment we can offer them is usually enough to bring healing, but there is always room for prayer given the extensiveness of their afflictions. In addition, our ultimate hope is that they will get to know God better through everything that takes place in the process.

On an up note, as of the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, the dental team performed over 6,000 treatments on over 2,200 patients. Our clinic in Monrovia this year is located away from town in relation to the ship as opposed to last year's clinic which was on the other side of town. This allowed us several days of treatment that would have otherwise been cancelled due to civil unrest downtown in the period before Liberia's elections. I have no doubt in my mind that many of those treatments mean the prevention of some of the severe problems I talked about above. It is good to remember this in the midst of all the despair.

***Acres of Courage***

Kristin has been doing a lot with Acres of Hope, Samuel's old orphanage. She takes a group from the ship every week to go visit. She delivers answers to medical questions from doctors on the ship, helps Patty, the international director, with some management issues, and encourages the nannies and administrative workers. It has become her ministry here in Liberia and she loves it. Samuel travels with her each week and Taylor, Lauren and I get involved as often as we can.

Kristin recently helped to get seven year old Kenneth into Acres of Hope. Kenneth Jayswen (we called him Jay) slowly befriended the dental team as he was staying in the pediatric ward in Redemption, where we have the dental clinic. His father thought he had a "black witch" in him and held his face in a fire. He will be figuratively and physically scarred for life. We soon found out that his father had not been to the hospital to visit Kenneth in over two weeks. Kristin took on the emotionally enormous task of finding his father and explaining the option of signing away his rights so that Kenneth could be adopted through the orphanage. She and I expected to meet a madman, someone very frightening in appearance and demeanor. But we would encounter a small man you would never imagine capable of such abuse. One of our dental translators helped explain his options and two days later he signed the papers. Please pray that God would find loving parents for Jay (Kenneth) and pray also for his six other siblings who will remain with the potentially abusive father.



*Taylor*



*Future Baja 1000 driver.*



*Lauren*

*A friend at the orphanage.*

The girls are doing well in (and enjoying, more importantly) school. Samuel is your typical 18 month old boy and dances and runs nearly non-stop. We all feel extremely happy and privileged to be here doing what little we can do. Thanks once again for your prayers and support.



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