



In our line of work, perhaps we're a bit anxious to use the word and tend to throw it around a bit too loosely. I think once in three and a half years isn't too loose, although I'm about to make it three times. *Miracle*. If you still think I use it too loosely, I'll take this part of its definition in the dictionary, which actually does sell the word a bit short but, nonetheless, it is something *that excites admiring awe*.

The dental team has seen some serious stuff in the past few months, even weeks. It would seem that the West African rainy season (Liberia is the wettest of its nations) takes its toll on the health of its people. This is just a theory, but as we began to see waves of patients who suffer from infections far beyond even the abnormally severe problems that already plague Liberia, the other dentists and doctors can't help but agree.

A picture runs in my mind of a family of five or six, living in a one room house not much bigger than my kitchen with dirt floors, an aluminum roof with holes, and a tarpaulin over that to unsuccessfully help keep the place dry. The mattress, if they have one, is wet. Their clothes are wet. The ground is wet, if not from the leaky roof, from water running from the outside in. The family hasn't eaten much in a while. Maybe work has been slim for the father; we'll say he's a mason. While fortunate to even have a line of work, he is maybe working less than half of his normal hours due to the rain. This means less food, less nutrition. Add this problem to a constantly wet, cold body and you've got yourself a very low immune system.

The result—a tooth infection takes the opportunity to cause some trouble. The body can no longer suppress the infection that's been brewing for years and years. In just a few short days, the patient's throat is starting to swell. The patient can't swallow anything, even water, making them even weaker and more malnourished and dehydrated. They can't even lie down, as their airway begins to close and they begin coughing and are forced to sit up. So not much sleep or rest, either.

This last paragraph describes Grace, who developed most of these problems even after her infected tooth was already removed. Several days later, she sat in my dental chair and with no other alternative, I decided to drain her infection under local anesthetic. Not fun for either of us, but mission accomplished. Unfortunately, things were not over for Grace.

Our dental coordinator, Joseph, took her back to the ship for an x-ray to make sure there was no other unseen problem causing the infection. The x-ray never happened, but Grace being on the ship would turn out to be more than a blessing. Grace collapsed on the ship and began to have a febrile seizure. When her temperature was taken, it was 41.8°C (106°F). Her systolic blood pressure was only in the 60s.

Grace was admitted to the ship's Intensive Care Unit, which a few weeks before received its first few patients, also from the dental clinic. Her blood was very anemic due to the severity of the infection, but Grace could not receive a transfusion because of antibodies in her blood. It was not looking good. That night she was intubated to maintain her airway and the anesthesiologist (anaesthetist) that tubed her stated he did not feel she would make it through the night.

The four doctors on the ship discussed what the plans would be or even whether or not the patient could be resuscitated should the need arise during the night. The anesthetist commented, “We already are resuscitating here.” They had done all that they could do and not much else could bring her back if she slipped away.

Miracle—Thankfully, with a lot of prayer from the ship’s crew and the ICU nurses, against all odds, Grace started to turn around drastically in the middle of the night. I didn’t even want to go down there the next morning. I saw the anaesthetist on the outside deck early that morning. He gave me the good news that Grace was still with us. After over a week recovering on the ward, she went home yesterday thanking God for saving her life. Earlier that week, while she still couldn’t talk, I remember how she would continuously point to the sky when I would say how much she was improving. One day, she pointed at us. The nurse that was there said, “It was God, not us. There wasn’t much we could do.” She then pointed at the sky, then at us, and then back at herself. “Don’t make me cry, Grace,” I told her.

#2—Some of you may remember the story we told last year of a boy we called Jay; Kenneth Jayswen. His story’s here:

http://www.geocities.com/chapmanmercyships/Newsletter_Mar_06_Web.pdf

but here’s the Cliff Notes—Jay had been abandoned at Redemption Hospital where the Mercy Ships’ dental clinic operated. His father had burned his face in a fire and he also had scars from cuts on his chest. Kristin was able to approach the father, who signed away rights so Jay could be adopted and not have to return to an abusive situation. He has been in Acres of Hope, Samuel’s old orphanage, ever since.

Well, I got a call from Patty just a few nights ago, and Jay’s adoptive parents, Alan and Lori, are in Liberia to finalize the process! So where’s the miracle, you’re asking...

I was speechless when Patty told me, “His new dad has scars on his face.” Not only that, but Alan’s father was named Kenneth and his brother...Jay. Unbelievable. A miracle. Patty said the new proud father stated, “I knew he was my boy.” We had the privilege of meeting them and seeing Jay for one last time just before they all flew out to the U.S. How great it was not only to wave good-bye to them, but to see Jay driving off to his new life and new family. Alan said to Kristin before leaving, “Thanks for loving him before we could.”



Jay and his new mom and dad

As far as our family, things are going well with us here on the new ship. Samuel just turned 3, Lauren 7 just yesterday, and Taylor will be 9 in November. They have all started school and have great teachers once again. Samuel was required to be potty trained before he started preschool, so that gave us the motivation we needed to stop prolonging the inevitable. He's finally into big boy underwear and really loves his Wiggles and Lightning McQueen undies. Wiggles underpants. Boy, you know your music career has hit the heights when you have a caricature of your face on a 3 year old's backside. Enough about underwear...

Kristin has taken on part time work again as the assistant for the director of the Mental Health Program, a new program on the ship that trains local pastors to be able to identify mental health issues so that they can obtain proper care for the person. It also includes an addiction program, something unheard of here; a real answer to my prayer for this part of the world, where alcoholism lingers unrecognized and untreated and the church tends to look down its nose at the victims of the disease.

We'll be back in the United States for about four months from the beginning of December. We plan to make the usual stops; San Antonio , Nashville , and Ponca City , plus a few along the way. We are trying to raise funding for the dental clinic we're establishing in Liberia . The goal is to raise monthly or yearly support covering all that the clinic needs for its yearly operation, about \$40-50,000 after producing an estimated \$20-25,000 from the small fees we plan on charging. If you have any type of group for which we might be able present and raise awareness and support for the clinic, please let us know.

The truth shall make you free....

I want to just end by telling a story of a patient who was recently treated on the ship. I am always looking for a way to explain how our work here is always so much more than the specific jobs we do. I believe one such way, in general, is bringing the truth. With low education comes more belief in superstition and, therefore, as I see it, living life in unnecessary fear. Jesus said, "For this I have been born [to be a king], and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth." And of course he said that if we live in His word, we will know the truth and the truth will make us free.

Bendu's village did not know the truth. Not only were they living in fear, but spreading that fear to Bendu and nearly causing her daughter, Sah, who was born both deaf and blind to miss out on a wonderful blessing that God had for him. Members of Bendu's village told her not to take Sah to the ship because we would take out her eyes and sail away with both of them as slaves. But fortunately, Bendu had faith in the truth.

She made the trek to the ship and our eye surgeons were able to give sight to both of Sah's eyes. What a testimony to their village of the truth of God's goodness when she returned. The fear will start to dissipate. The lies will lose their sting. The truth will set them free.



Bendu and Sah

keith and kristin ><>

He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. **1 Samuel 2:8**

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