

## **Vicki and Chris**

### **News from the Anastasis**

### **Feb 2001 Benin, West Africa**



The Mercy Ships teams arrived early at Cotonou's sports and art arena the morning of January 24th to begin the second two-day screening for patients to receive surgery onboard. A sea of faces, begging for hope and a chance at a new life, already lined the arena garden. Many had come the previous evening, more arriving as the darkness turned to dawn. Each one had a story to tell. Many had spent most of their earnings to come for one last chance. For some, it would be worth it. For others, it meant being turned away once again. Vicki had the hard job of being one of the medical team explaining to those we couldn't operate on. But other crew members came alongside them, offering consolation and praying for them.

Back in the arena, nurses checked pulses, asked questions, filled out forms. Doctors examined tumours, clefts, cataracts, and a multitude of other problems. Finally, with another 114 maxillo-facial and 78 eye surgeries on the roster, the weary medical team and crew packed their equipment knowing that for those who carried the precious appointment cards, and for those who had seen God's healing, a new hope and another chance had been given.

Brigitte, only 12 years old, had been ill for the past three years. A large melon-sized tumour protrudes from her little face, distorting her mouth and stretching her nose. She found it difficult to breathe - the air rasping in and out of invaded passageways so has been fitted with a tracheostomy. She also has feeding via a nose to stomach tube as the tumour sat like a tennis ball in her mouth. When we came across Bridgette, her haemoglobin count was right down to 2.3, (the normal count is 12 to 15). Brigitte is very weak and has been given five blood transfusions before her major surgery this week.

*Hello from the hot and sticky nation of Benin! We are now nearly half way through our first African outreach as long term crew on the Anastasis and are really enjoying the challenges of being here.*

*We have experienced so many different things that it's hard to know which ones to write about - I hope this newsletter gives you some insight into the things we've been doing and seeing.*

*It's very satisfying being part of a Christian work that is involved in so many different things - from orphanage work to building sites, dental clinics to Jesus film nights, surgeries to motorcycle maintenance!*

*We hope that you will come on board the Anastasis when we come to Guernsey and the UK this summer to see and hear more about the things the ship crew have been involved in here.*



**Dr Gary Parker examines Brigitte**



A last minute arrival to the screening, escorted by her uncle was Sabina, aged 9. She has a version of what is otherwise known as cancrum oris, but in her eye. Cancrum oris, also known as "the melting disease", is a gangrenous disease caused by a viral-bacteria that eats away the flesh, leaving a gaping hole in the face. This first appeared on her nose about four years ago and she soon stopped going to school when the infection worsened. Her parents took her to a hospital where she spent a month undergoing a series of medication and injections, but the treatment had no effect. Sabina's uncle, heard the announcement about the Mercy Ship's screening on the radio and brought her to us. Now Sabina has had the infected eye removed and looks much better.

Vicki has always been interested in health education as it equips people to prevent and treat simple health problems that cause great suffering in Africa. She has trained a group of 10 local people to teach others about diarrhoea, scabies, nutrition, worms and malaria using pictures, stories and art projects. Now there are daily teaching sessions on the hospital ward, given by those she has trained. It has been so successful that more teaching is planned about birth spacing, pregnancy, baby care and sexually transmitted diseases.



Photo: Carley Rae  
Ward interpreters teach basic health and nutrition to patients on the ward

**At the orphanage...**

There are several 'Mercy Ministry teams' in Benin – crew from the ship who give up their time off to go to hospitals, orphanages, church clubs and so on. Chris and I have chosen to work in a centre for older children - home for abandoned/orphaned boys and former child slaves. It is a hard place to visit and at first there was little enthusiasm to go to a place where the children are not cute and cuddly but rough and bitter. Vicki is the assistant leader for the team and each week we plan a programme of games and fun activities plus Bible stories and some health teaching. We have also started to re-decorate the place, which is dark and gloomy, with the help of some of the older boys.



A few weeks ago, Dodji's mother dropped him off there and telling him that she was going to buy a pair of shoes for him, she disappeared. "I don't know why she left," said 10-yr-old Dodji, crying at the memory "but I think she has gone to Nigeria." He is no use to her as he has only one eye. Amazingly, we were able to fit Dodji with a prosthetic eye on the Anastasis, so he now looks much better and we hope his future will be brighter. There were also 4 new boys last week that told us, with tears in their eyes, that they had been taken by soldiers at the border and brought to the centre. Their older brothers are now in prison for attempted smuggling of children as slaves into Nigeria. These boys feel a mixture of confusion and betrayal and don't know what the future holds for them. How we wish we could do something more for these poor boys who are so traumatised and seem without hope.

**And finally...**

In our last newsletter, we asked for prayer for Vicki's vision to start a Christian club for young children of the crew. 'Lighthouse' is now underway, with 10 children aged 5-7 enjoying weekly times of praise and worship with puppets, drama and dance, and Bible study and prayer too.

It's great fun and really inspiring to see the bold faith and joy of small children who trust in God.



Thank you for the many cards and letters we received over Christmas – it is wonderful receiving news from home!  
Please continue to write or email and tell us about what is going on in your lives

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