

The Gregg's Newsletter from the Anastasis The Gambia May 2002

Farewell to Sierra Leone

In the middle of March, the Anastasis left Sierra Leone to go to the next port of call in the Gambia. We left with mixed emotions – we were exhausted both physically and emotionally after working with some of the poorest and neediest people in the world, but we were also reluctant to leave with so much left undone. The people of Sierra Leone had both broken our hearts with their stories and won our hearts with their friendliness and determination to look with hope to the future.

An incredible amount was achieved in Sierra Leone.



Sierra Leone Summary

During our time on Sierra Leone 656 patients had operations on board the Anastasis. Procedures included facial reconstruction, cleft lip and palate repair, tumour and cataract removal, vaginal fistula repairs, orthopaedic and plastic surgeries. Many of our patients were war-wounded.

In the community Vicki trained 63 community health teachers who went on to teach preventative health in 18 villages, urban Freetown, in a refugee camp and on Banana Island. Subjects included: diarrhoea, malaria, worms, nutrition, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, hygiene, infant health, family planning, safe and healthy pregnancy. Her team also gave 3200 sets of immunisations to women of child-bearing age and children under 5.

The ship dental team did over 6000 treatments and the Relief and Development department built a medical clinic and trained villagers in water & sanitation and rebuilt 30 latrines and rehabilitated 6 wells. In an area devastated by the rebels 26 homes were rebuilt and 11 new ones were started to encourage people to resettle from the refugee camps. 37 students were trained in a vocational programme - masons, carpenters and welders and village women in cottage industries. In addition tools, seeds and fertiliser were distributed to 499 families and a community fishing boat was refurbished and nets provided for a local fishing co-op.

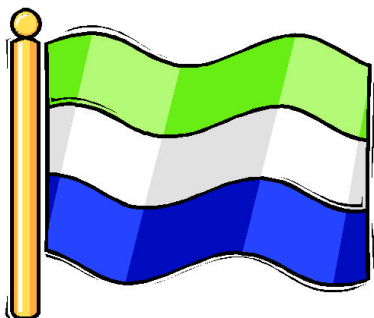
The Cotton Tree Club

Vicki co-led a team who worked with the children in one of the worst refugee camps in Freetown. They had over 200 children coming to their club every Saturday – many of them orphaned and all affected by the war to different degrees. It was a heart-breaking time for the team but it gave the children a little respite from their difficult lives and they loved it.



Babies named after us!

In Moeba Town Vicki was leading a health teaching course with Traditional Birth Attendants. During the course, baby Vicki and baby Chris were born! It was an honour to have brown babies named after us – but we don't think we'll return the favour – the Gregg baby will not have an African name!



Another African port - The Gambia!

In March, we arrived in The Gambia for a follow-up visit to the outreach here in 1999/2000. Although the needs in The Gambia are much less than in Sierra Leone, it is still a very poor country.

The Gambia	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✍ Smallest country in West Africa – 1.2 million people. ✍ Little natural resources – economy based on tourism and peanut export. ✍ Ex British colony with slave trading history – coup in 1994 but now peaceful. ✍ Life expectancy of just 46 yrs ⁽¹⁹⁹⁹⁾ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✍ Large divide between rich and poor – especially visible is the contrasts in the tourist areas. ✍ It is estimated that there are only 5 government doctors and 4 dentists in the country. ✍ Health problems – malaria, malnutrition and infant and maternal mortality at birth. ✍ 90% of the people are Muslims.

Vicki's work

In the Gambia Vicki led a refresher course for village Community Health Workers to enable them as they treat diseases and teach preventative health care in their communities. Now she is spending some time working in schools to try and improve hygiene and sanitation plus teaching health science and resourcing the teachers to teach health. She also enjoys having the chance to help out at a mobile health clinic run by the Methodist Mission in 5 rural villages.

Mission Challenge

In April we had the privilege of leading a short-term team from Guernsey. It was great to have friends and members of our church visit the ship and experience a little of West Africa.

The team spent much of their time on a project to renovate a primary school building but they also had the chance to visit hospital patients, work with children and be involved in activities on board – including scrubbing the decks! Some of the team also went prison visiting and half the team got involved in helping Vicki teach about hygiene in the school. We hope that the experiences the team had will stay with them for a long time and that others may be encouraged to come and do something similar in the future...

Chris' work

Having been short staffed for much of the last two years we are now up to full strength of 6 people. This has meant we are able to catch up on many of the projects that have been put on hold, and to improve our service to the computer users on the Anastasis. Unfortunately this will be short-lived as by October, we will again be down to 3 staff. Still, I've enjoyed being part of a bigger team and it has been a relief not to work so many extra hours.

On the ward

Surgeries continue in the hospital on board to relieve suffering and bring restoration to marred faces and blind eyes. In addition to our Gambian patients we had a surprise arrival of 2 boys flown in from Ethiopia. A missionary in Ethiopia had met the boys who had devastating facial deformities and knew about the work of Mercy Ships. Now the boys are receiving a series of surgeries to reconstruct their faces and have quickly become favourites on the ward – although they cannot speak English, French or any of the Gambian languages. Their courage and trust in us is amazing.

What's in store for the Greggs this summer?!

In July we will leave our home on the Anastasis for 3 months to have our first baby. It's an exciting time for us and we are really grateful to God for protecting Vicki from 'nasties' like malaria, during her pregnancy. We will go to Guernsey for the summer and return to the ship before she leaves Europe in October.

We are also hoping that the Anastasis will have time to make a short visit to Guernsey during the PR tour but this will depend on completing engineering work and the sailing schedule not being delayed. The Anastasis should also be in Bristol in September for 2 weeks and will be open to the public for anyone who would like to visit.

MV Anastasis Mercy Ships PO Box 2020 Garden Valley TX 75771-2020 USA	or	MV Anastasis Mercy Ships Maison de Rovereaux Chemin de la Fauvette 98 1012 Lauzanne Switzerland
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Email:	Chris@greggs.org Vicki@greggs.org
Tel:	00 1 954 538 4258 x2191
Fax:	0870 137 2543