

Texan News from the Greggs

Serving with Mercy Ships at the International Operations Centre.



Howdy Y'all

... from a frosty Texas.

We have brought the weather from Newcastle with us as it has been the coldest for several years with snow flurries and ice storms. When the sun comes out it really warms up though - a promise of things to come!

We feel we are adapting to life here. We have been made very welcome by the locals who love our British accent. The kids in particular are a constant attraction but we too have had funny questions like, 'do you know Supernanny?' and 'do you sing with an accent?' The different terms used for the same things also give rise to amusement: while talking about houses there was great interest in our expression gas 'hob' and smothered laughter when Chris talked about the chimney breast!

We have just finished membership classes at a church where we all feel comfortable - this was important to us as the churches are so very different here.

We still don't have our own car (but before you start feeling sorry for us we are being loaned a terrific people-carrier) BUT we do have a house. Well almost, it is only half built! It will be fantastic when it is done, it will have a big garden and is really in a quite rural location. No sea view though!!

The rather tempestuous start that Chris had at the Mercy Ships International Operations Centre has now become less stressful. He feels that he has a good team though he misses being able to debrief with colleagues over a pint. He also has a boss who is keen to mentor him in his managerial role and feels more ready for the challenges ahead.

So all in all, we feel quite settled here although living in Texas was never what we thought we would end up doing. It has been different. We have met some people from California who say that even they have had a culture shock coming here! but so far it is going well. Africa does feel far away and right now we are praying about an opportunity to go to the Africa Mercy on her first field assignment in Liberia in the summer. It would be wonderful to go and work on the frontline again and to see the fruit of our years in Newcastle, something we desire very much, but at the same time there are some doubts. It is a very critical time for Chris' work and it would also involve quite a commitment of our finances as we would not be going as essential crew.

We hope 2007 is proving to be a good year for you so far, please keep in touch!

With love from

Vicki, Chris, Stefan and Rebekah.

Anastasis and Africa Mercy Update



1345 patients have had eye surgeries onboard the Anastasis in Ghana. Over 1000 of them were blind and have received the gift of sight or restoration of vision long gone. It is so good to remember these things when days are tough at the office!

After setback upon setback, the Africa Mercy should be finally ready for 'sea trials' in March. We are really hoping that everything goes smoothly and that she passes all the maritime requirements so that she can prepare for her maiden voyage to Liberia in West Africa. It has certainly been a long time coming. Once the Africa Mercy is operational, the Anastasis will gracefully retire and is likely to end up in India, not so gracefully to be stripped for scrap. It is amazing to us that the Anastasis has been able to carry on and on despite her age and condition. The name Anastasis means 'resurrection' and it seems that she has truly lived up to that name.

At the moment, the Anastasis is in Ghana where she has been docked for 8 months while the crew perform many life-changing operations, health education and development projects. Construction teams have also built a new school wing, a maternity clinic and a youth centre in an area of sprawling urban poverty.

It has been a successful time but tragedy struck a month ago when one of the ship security guards was found dead in his cabin just a day before he was due to go home on leave. The post mortem found the cause to be cerebral malaria. It was a shock to all and a reminder of the risks of living in Africa, even in the relatively safe environment of a hospital ship.

We would love to hear from you!

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Chris, computers and conferences!

Since our last news letter, things have improved for me in the IT department. I appreciate good working relationships with the team members here and have been grateful for the arrival of an experienced project manager Janet, who is now working alongside me. However, there is a lot of hard work to do and high expectations of a critically short-staffed department. During the last few weeks I have been struggling to move forward on the things which I know are important because I am having to constantly trouble-shoot the more minor issues. I'm sure some of you can identify with that.

The work with the cabling and computer installation on the Africa Mercy has been completed satisfactorily. I had to go to Newcastle in December to oversee some of the final network installation and amazingly the trip coincided with the graduation from Sunderland University for my MBA (Masters in Business Administration). I have been able draw quite a bit from the things I learnt in the lectures already so it seems those long hours of study were worthwhile. I also had the chance to reconnect with old friends whilst I was there and stock up on some fair-trade tea and a few jars of Branston pickle too! I will have to go again to commission the satellite system during the Africa Mercy sea trials in March.

Also in March I am going to an International Maritime Information and Communications Technology conference at Trinity House in London where I have been invited to speak on Technology in Mercy Ships - an exciting but daunting prospect.

Stefan

Stefan continues to bring smiles to all he meets with his constant chatter and energy for life. He is still very curious. Those little hands get everywhere and we have to have sharp eyes to see what he is up to, but he is also pretty teachable and kind and helpful. He really enjoys wearing his cowboy outfit and still loves monkeys!

Rebekah

I am settling down nicely in Texas. I am very loving and like to ask everyone their name. I also like to ask the question 'How do Americans say...' and then try and mimic it and laugh. I enjoy being called 'cute' with my accent and love to chase Stefan pretending to be a poisonous snake. I can't wait to have our own house so that I can have a pet to



Vicki

I really am enjoying Texas very much so far. People are incredibly friendly here and there are many more Mums at home with their children which is great. The kids are pretty settled and I think I have found my way around the supermarket now! I have become a real murderer where spiders are concerned but thankfully haven't come across any more snakes or scorpions. I'm trying to find a good school for Stefan at the moment and a nursery for Rebekah for a couple of mornings a week - it's hard because the system is so different here! When Rebekah is three I hope to work part time and am looking into a volunteering at a home for pregnant teenagers.

It is easy to support the work of Vicki and Chris at Mercy Ships. Please contact us if you would like to know more about supporting Mercy Ships with a single gift or regularly. You can also see our website for details.

www.greggs.org