

28 February 2002

Hi again from the U.K.! I hardly know where to begin, but I thought I'd better take good advantage of this rare bit of free time to write. Our schedule has continued to fill, with what seems like every possible space packed—ministry opportunities in the area, drama practice for our upcoming outreach, and of course plain old classwork. I feel very disconnected from everyone back home right now, with so few chances to communicate, but I hope that will improve.

My time here is passing very quickly. In fact, our departure date for The Gambia is now set, and we'll fly out on 2 April. Only a handful of airlines fly into Banjul, the major city there, so flights are not cheap (and no discounts are offered for nonprofit organizations), but we now have tickets in hand. Pray, if you would, that all the visas would come through smoothly.

Work on the ship is finally beginning to have some more visible effects, with large amounts of junk and old building material being hauled off. The road ahead is still a long one for the Africa Mercy, with much of the money remaining to be seen, but some local pastors have told us they're not quite sure how to pray—for the ship to be finished so it can sail for Africa, or for it to have to stay here longer so that its impact on this area can continue! North of the river, in Newcastle, churches do okay, but here on the south side they all seem to struggle for some mysterious reason. Since the Africa Mercy arrived, though, these pastors say something has been changing, and they don't know exactly how or what, but they're excited. It's a great reminder that "outreach" begins not with a specific geographical location, but wherever you are: right here, right now. The Anastasis, the first Mercy Ship, discovered much the same thing during its laborious conversion that began in 1977. Their outfitting took place in Greece, and some special things happened there too as a result of their stay.

Don Stephens, the CEO of Mercy Ships, visited us last week—on my birthday, in fact. Twenty-five years ago that week, he said, they were negotiating the purchase of the huge old ocean liner that became the Anastasis. That is, he was speaking with presidents of banks and shipping companies from the pay phone at the campground where their little YWAM group was living that winter. Since those uncertain beginnings the ships have touched millions of lives, healing many thousands of people and bringing hope to entire cities. The Anastasis, in fact, is on outreach in Sierra Leone as we speak. Uncertainty is often where God can move the most, it seems. More than one visitor has come on board the Africa Mercy and mentioned later that they'd thought the crew was totally crazy—"God, whose insane dream was this anyway?"—until down in the dim chill of the rail deck they heard God whisper, "Mine."

And it will also be good to join the Anastasis down in The Gambia four weeks from now. Most likely our DTS class will be living on a YWAM base near the ship and dividing into three groups so that we can work in different areas, including helping out aboard the ship. I'm personally looking forward to tasting life on the Anastasis, because not long from now I will have the opportunity to choose a ship to serve on after this DTS is over! Please, pray for me in that decision. And as long as you're thinking of it, it would be great if my class stayed healthy during the outreach. We'll be on malaria meds, of course, and we've all had the usual vaccinations for yellow fever, typhoid, meningitis, etc., but various forms of dysentery and many other things (and, of course, the plain old Big D) have no real prevention sometimes. So believe me, prayer for that would be very much appreciated.

Thank you so much for your prayers and thoughts. It's so encouraging to have those to lean on. I look forward very much to hearing what's going on with you these days—it's definitely a highlight of any day to hear from someone back home. If you'd like to see some photos from here, check out <http://syddeus.tripod.com/jja> for a few—click on the "Jan" and "Feb" buttons along the top of the front page. Hopefully I'll soon have a few seconds to upload some more! Until next time....

Love,

Jeremy