

Coming to you live from Belize via satellite....Actually, I am. The Caribbean Mercy's new satellite communications system was just installed, and our dock near the town of Dangriga is over two miles down a deserted swamp road from the nearest phone or power line. Only one crocodile has been sighted on this road as yet, but after dark there are many interesting sounds in the bushes. According to the local health official, malaria is nothing to fear in Belize (that is, "It is quite treatable"), and the resident snake population – while including one of the world's more aggressive vipers ("Don't worry, it will only chase you if it is angry") – can be dealt with at the district hospital. So it'll be life as usual on outreach, it seems.

Belize is a safe, hospitable country, and yet this port is one of the most primitive places the Caribbean Mercy has moored for an outreach. Now that the ship is finally free from the constraints of shaky or nonexistent landlines for vital communications, we'll have greater access to Latin America's most remote and needy areas. Our "new" satellite system may be secondhand and slow by industry standards, but it will change a lot for us. It will also make



things easier on our U.S. fundraising/PR tours where, in these security-conscious times, a little Panamanian-flagged Mercy Ship with a very international crew is not always granted priority berthing near the phone lines. But even aside from the satellite system, next summer's procurement tour will be the best yet, as far as I'm concerned, cuz the Caribbean Mercy is coming to Chicago next July! The dates aren't set, but plans are being laid for Mercy Ships' first Great Lakes stops in seven years. Duluth, Toronto, Montreal, and Grand Haven are also on the list.

First, though, we have to finish another outreach, a stop in drydock, and another PR tour after the outreach we've just begun. The procurement phase we've just finished took us from Halifax to Boston to Port Canaveral, Florida as we recruited crew and loaded supplies. The last time I wrote, I was with the deck department (traditional motto: "If it moves, we move it. If it doesn't move, we paint it") because we were so short on crew. For a while, we had barely enough to fill the gangway watch rotation, and people were working ten days at a stretch. But over the last several weeks, more deckhands have arrived, and now we're almost up to a full complement. It's a vast relief to have enough people again to tackle the ever-advancing rust.



So my Deck days are over, at least for now, and I have morphed from Ordinary Seaman (newly certified) into Medical Warehouse Manager. Basically, I am the link between the cargo holds and the operating room. I keep the medical teams supplied with everything they need. I personally think it's one of the most fun jobs on board, although in the event of a hurricane alert, it will rapidly become one of the worst. Last outreach, I was secretly hoping for a hurricane, just a little one, but I've kind of



gotten away from that since reading the details of the ship's contingency plan. If a storm with a name comes within two days' distance of us, the equipment that took us a full week to unload will be crammed back into the holds in about twenty-four highly eventful hours.



But under these sunny skies, the big Army-surplus tents we use for patient care are up and ready, and the first hopeful people will walk in for screening tomorrow morning. This is a land of somewhat better health care than its Spanish-speaking neighbors, but Belize is still a developing nation – there are a total of four paved highways in this country – and the people are in need of everything we can give. The orthopedics people flew in ahead of the ship to get an early start, and the traveling health care teams have been seeking out seminar

sites. And the Community Development guys' first project was a favor to the medical department: they've been digging a pit latrine for the patients, next to the dock. The existing facilities consisted of a bench over a hole in the pier.

It's hard, trying to think of how to describe everyday life on the ship to someone who's never seen it – the exciting parts, the dull parts; what I do at work, what I do for fun; what it's like to live in a traveling community where the view out the window is of a different culture every time you turn around. I'm already past the halfway point in my initial two-year commitment, surprising as it sounds. It's still agreeing with me (and my hair) – and I'm still seeing this ship make a difference. Next month I'll try to sketch out more of a picture of the daily routine on board, as well as what's going on in the hearts and minds of some of the people whose lives cross paths with mine. Till then, thank you for your prayers, your love, your support. I couldn't be helping here without it.



Jeremy

p.s. I'm on the website, under Newsroom/Caribbean Mercy Reports/Aug 1-15 – that's me at the bottom of the gangway in the pics. <http://www.mercyships.org/News/News.cfm?ID=355&c=25>