

I t's 0700: I wake to the sound of the travel alarm clock wedged into the corner above my bunk. It's another day on the Caribbean Mercy, docked in the brilliant sun of steamy southern Belize. Actually, we've just arrived in Jacksonville, FL, the first of our three repair and resupply ports for this PR phase, but I'd like to bring you along for "a day in the life" on board the ship during outreach, now that I finally have time to write....Where was I? Ah. Putting on my scrubs.



0713: Perfectly timed. I make it up to the breakfast line with two minutes to spare and grab a bowl of cereal with the usual UHT "milk in a box." I sit down next to Chris and Aarnaut, two Dutch guys working in Community Development Services who have toasted approximately half a loaf of bread apiece, and hear the details of this week's CDS project. They're helping a village build a community waterbasin.

0730: It's Friday, which means the morning gathering today is designated for Reporting—time for the whole crew to get together and hear what everyone else is up to. The Health Care Teams are back briefly from their travels, and they tell us stories from the remote towns they've been working in. Captain



Kathy Shankle asks us to pray for another engineering officer so we can make the sail to Jacksonville. The chief operations officer asks people to please return any cups in their cabins to the pantry. The Dental people report that they've been very busy, with forty or fifty walk-ins the day before, and a bit warm. It's over a hundred degrees every day in their clinic. The new hygienist from the States is freaking out a little.

0800: I put on my Coppertone and head out to my army-surplus-tent medical warehouse on the dock to see if the surgical team has left me any supply requests. We're out of Betadine swabs, and I notify the duty officer that I'm climbing down into Cargo Hold 2 for a while. By 8:30 the overhead doors are open and they've got the crane going, so I grab the hook the next time it comes down and Jan, the bosun, swings my pallet up and over to the dock.

1000: Break time. Everyone descends on the dining room for coffee (why do we drink hot beverages in 99 percent humidity?) and stuff from the snack bar. When I wander in, they're laughing at Missy and Rodrigo, deckies from Florida and Brazil who have been sentenced to paint the inside of the anchor chain locker. After the first two hours of needle gunning and wire-wheeling on the accumulated rust and filth, Missy has approximately the same skin tone as Alex, who walks in next, except Alex is from Sierra Leone, and his is natural.



1128: The optical clinic director calls the ship and asks if I have time to shuttle some people back and forth. I sign out the old blue Nissan, which has seen far too many Central American kilometers for one truck, and make a run into town. On the way in, I stop off at the hospital to drop off some medical supplies. Mercy Ships often receives the odds and ends of others, so anything we're donating to someone else in turn is going to be odd indeed, but the local hospital (a nice one, by Latin American standards) is glad for it. I help myself to a gurney, trying to disregard the encrusted stains beneath, and wheel my boxes in from the truck



1300: After lunch, it's time to light things on fire. The ship's general trash gets picked up by three local guys in a truck, who comb it very thoroughly first for anything they can use, eat (usually on the spot), or possibly resell. But since there's not quite an infrastructure in this country for handling infectious surgical waste, our normal procedure is to burn it. I haul the latest six big red biohazard bags down to the end of the long pier, where I've knocked some holes in an old fifty-gallon drum with a fire axe. The sun is blazing, and the smoke from burning vinyl and body fluids, I can tell you, is like nothing I've ever seen. I've learned to bring Gatorade and a cowboy hat for these little sessions. Today, it only takes about two hours. I empty my five-gallon standby bucket on the sludge and head back to the ship.

1530: Back down into the cargo hold. I spend another hour crawling around in the dim spaces below the tweendecks, working on an inventory so we know how much to order for the next outreach. After that, the real rush is on, as work ends and the Ultimate Frisbee types head out in the van to find an open field in town. We play until it gets dark, making it back just in time for the last ten minutes of supper. After that, the evening gets going. People collect in various places on the ship, some playing cards, some emailing home, some just enjoying a chat. Several clandestine warriors start up a network game, fighting a WWII battle from computers scattered throughout the ship. I think I've just killed the chief officer. Or was it the school principal? Hard to tell... One by one, people take their leave and head to bed, more or less ready to get up and minister another day, whether they're cooking lunch or doing surgery. And this is my life – a bit different now that I'm returning to my position as Discipleship Training School staff, but there you have it. I hope this gives you some idea of what you're helping to accomplish out here. Sometimes the narrow perspective is as important as the overall picture, because really, this is all about touching one life at a time. Thank you for believing in my part of this. I'm pretty glad for your support.



God's peace,

Jeremy