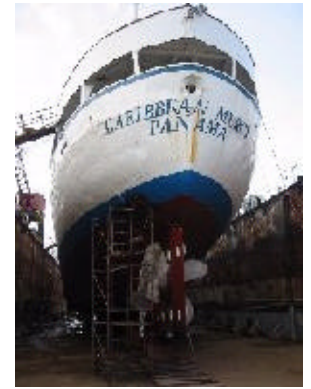




Greetings from...where am I again? I've had to stop and think in order to remember lately, more than once. Flying to a country "ahead of the ship" takes on an entirely new meaning when the ship doesn't show up. While I was in Honduras with the training school group I was helping to lead, the surveyor in this Mobile, Alabama shipyard was discovering a few more holes in the ship's fifty-two-year-old hull than

they had quite planned on fixing in the original schedule. The end result was that we've only just gotten out of drydock, and we won't be able to sail until the end of the month. The ship has flown me back up here to the States to rejoin the rest of the crew rather than waiting the month out in Honduras on my own. Welders and steelworkers are still working two shifts on board as we remain tied up at this working dock beside giant cranes and piles of metal.



The good news, however – besides the fact that we're in the water again – was that the students in the group we were leading were remarkably flexible about being stranded in Central America when the ship failed to arrive. While the four of us on staff down there worked to sort out the details of Plans C and D (Plan B being old news) with little communication and less money, the students continued planning children's programs, working with local churches, teaching English in the schools, and helping to screen future surgical patients. One weekend they conducted a seminar on emotionally and physically healthy relationships for a large number of the local young people – a sobering undertaking in a country that contains only seventeen percent of Central America's population but *sixty* percent of its HIV cases...not to mention the serious consequences of childbearing at the age of eleven or twelve.



They were listening carefully. All in all, several local leaders told us, our group had made a major impression on the town during the seven weeks of our stay. I was floored and completely humbled when the people packed into the church on our last night there, many of them teary-eyed above their smiles, and lined up to embrace all twenty of us – all four hundred of them. The students had built some amazing relationships during our time in the area. Best of all, we just heard that several of the friends they'd been closest to in town have decided to commit themselves to living for God, in part because of what they saw in the students' lives.

So anticipation is running high in Puerto Castilla for the ship's arrival, and those of us who were just there are looking forward to seeing some familiar faces there again. Most of the DTS students have flown home to their various nations, and the four of us on staff are already on our next assignments. Brad and Jennie, the married half of the staff, caught a bus over to Guatemala, while our department director managed to get the other two of us – the engaged half – flown back here to the ship. Yes, it's true what you hear about community living and loving thy neighbor and all that...take it a little too far, and look what happens. Katie Brocks and I were already great friends before last fall, but after a year and a half of working side by side on the ship, we've finally given up and decided to start planning a wedding. :) Just thought I'd toss that little news item in there! If you'd like details, I'd love to give them. November will be the big month! Photo to the right, and updates to follow....



In light of all this, what's next? After the upcoming Honduras outreach, the Caribbean Mercy will be sailing up the St. Lawrence Seaway and through the Great Lakes for several fundraising stops – including Duluth, Grand Haven, Chicago, and Toronto. It's very exciting to think of showing to my friends and family the ship I've called home for the last two years, when it visits (tentatively!) at Navy Pier in September. Katie, having already extended her commitment by several months, plans to return to New York in mid-June to get a job



and save up some money before the wedding. With my commitment ending in late July, the Great Lakes also seem to be the right place for me to step off and prepare for the new adventure of being married. Looking ahead, though, both of us cherish the idea of returning to one of the ships sometime in the future. With all the difficulties, uncertainties, thrills, and hard work, there is no life in the world quite like this. Which, after a certain amount of time spent in a shipyard, can start to seem like a good thing....

As the Caribbean Mercy finalizes its preparations for the Honduras outreach, the crew is very eager to get down there and get started at last. The dental team is already in place in the town we'll be docked in, since their equipment could be sent down independently of the ship. We've sent down a mobile optical team, too, which has been traveling the dirt roads from village to village, conducting screenings and treating everything they can. In the meantime, the work on the ship goes on, the sounds of steel on steel reverberating late into the night across this Mobile channel. But we're almost ready, and if last time was any predictor, the smiles on the faces of the people who welcome us will remind us that it was worth it. Thank you so much for your faithfulness in standing behind me to make it happen!

Jeremy