

I watched a man die recently. He was a soldier, but the line of duty that killed him was only a training class on the Honduran navy base where the Caribbean Mercy was docked until just last week. It happened right in front of our ship – they were diving, something went wrong, and the first thing any of us knew, one of his fellow soldiers was at our gangway pleading for help while the others dragged their friend out of the water. Our crew nurse hurried down the dock, quickly followed by our entire eye surgery team, between procedures, still in their blue scrubs and surgical caps. They worked feverishly to revive him, doing CPR compressions on their knees in the sand for an eternity of nearly half an hour as they tried to shock his heart to life. All of their efforts failed. Our ophthalmologist had the difficult job of declaring him dead at three o'clock on that bright afternoon.



Can anyone ever really internalize the fact that, in the end, tragedies and statistics are one and the same? Some of the children I have met in the last two years are almost certainly no longer alive, and yet they are counted by the outside world not as smiling faces but as numbers in a list, if at all. When the bishop of nearby Trujillo died, not long after the sailor drowned, the mayor asked us if they could keep him for a while in our freezer. The juxtapositions can be hard on my sheltered, health-cared North American mind. After one Mercy Ships outreach in Nicaragua, a horrific mudslide destroyed entire villages there, killing many people the ship had just spent months working tenderly to help. More and more, I have to conclude that what matters in this world is really not the numbers at all, but the process – not the “end” result (if one can be said to exist, in our run-together human stories) so much as the helping hand given along the way. We'll never know the rest of the stories of most of the lives we touch, but we can hope that they will have felt and tasted, if only for a few moments, God's love expressed through their fellow human beings.



And to that end, the work of this ship goes on. When the Caribbean Mercy sailed from Honduras last week, it also actually marked the beginning of the end of my two years with this ship. (A note about logistics: if you would like to send support, any checks to be processed for me must arrive at the Mercy Ships office by the last week of July.) On July 15 I'll be stepping off to start getting ready, with Katie, for our wedding later this fall. After that, we're still looking together at one of the other two ships – perhaps one with more couples' cabins, a highly prized commodity here – in our short list of possibilities for next year.

In the meantime, the end of an outreach is as sad and happy at once as any parting can be. This time in Honduras, while I kept the operating rooms supplied in my position as the medical warehouse manager, the other departments of the ship were as busy as ever. The community development people went out in 4x4s and dugout canoes to reach distant villages with their work in agriculture and water purification. The mobile health care teams treated patients and trained local workers to teach classes in sanitation and disease prevention. Katie kept the ship's many computers running so that others' work could continue. Many of the crew also, as usual, got involved on their own time with orphanages and local families nearby. It was a shorter outreach than usual, but there were many special things about it. The ability to do surgery on the smallest children for the first time, with our newly donated anesthesia suite up and running, was a wonderful thing. Some of these children were young enough that they will never even remember being blind or having crossed eyes – they have been set free to live normal, healthy lives, with hope for the future. *Thank you* for your part in making this happen!



This may have been my last outreach on board the Caribbean Mercy, but I am as happy to be here now as I was during my first. Still, one of the things I'm happiest about right now is that soon I'll get to see friends and family again at last. Unfortunately, while I'll be coming home, the ship will not – because of strict new maritime security laws just coming into effect, it won't be able to visit the Great Lakes until those ports comply with the new international regulations, as most coastal ports have already. But I'm holding out hope that before too long this ship will have fresh water under the hull again, and maybe even the Chicago skyline behind it. Until then – I hope to see you soon.

God's peace to you,
Jeremy