

Ever wonder how six months can feel like six quick days and six whole years at the same time? We do. Our half-year commitment is already at an end, and the time has come again for us to leave the ship. No time spent with Mercy Ships can ever be even close to mundane, but to say this was an eventful six months...well, that still might be understating things a bit.



The Caribbean Mercy is now safely laid up in a berth north of Mobile, Alabama, partway through a six-to-twelve-month evaluation period, temporarily out of service. As far as the ministry is concerned, it's actually a good time for us to step off. Extensive steelwork will be needed in order to keep the 52-year-old ship "in class," safe and



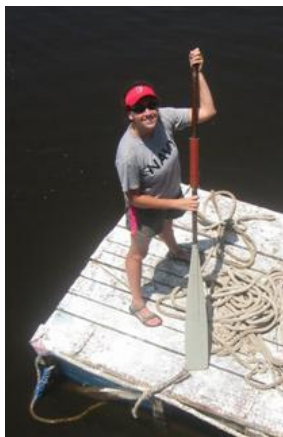
sailing for years to come, so a planning team is hard at work evaluating costs, needs, and future destinations to determine how this ship's unique capabilities can best be used in the future to serve the poorest of this world's poor. In the meantime, a small caretaker crew of six or eight people is staying on board to do security and maintenance. (See <http://cbmcaretakers.blogspot.com> for a peek at life on board right now.) We had the privilege of being a part of this caretaker crew for a month and a half after everyone else was transferred off.

And it was different, to say the least. It was so dark and quiet with most of the power off, so blazingly hot without the A/C; but most of all, it was *empty*. The heart of a Mercy Ship is its crew—a traveling collection of like-minded yet absurdly diverse people, coming from every dot on the map you can imagine, working and living in much-too-close proximity on a job that never ends. The communal life on board is fatiguing, mentally challenging, highly stressful, physically difficult, and emotionally grueling. It's wonderful. It's the best thing about the whole organization, the most enjoyable and deeply fulfilling part of all. And ours was snatched from its exhilarating Central American itinerary and stuck in an Alabama swamp, with no departure in sight. Then, it was gutted from a hundred people strong to only nine—only two of whom had an officer's license or even much maritime knowledge at all.

So our last month and a half was a new experience for everyone. We pulled together as a group of nine, eating our meals in the little crew galley and holding our evening meetings in the fresh air on the dock. We chased away stray dogs and tried to fix things that leaked. We tore up decking and deckheads in search of more steel in need of repair. We hunkered down for near-direct hits from two tropical storms and evacuated for a full-fledged hurricane. And for the crew still on board, now that we're gone, this work goes on every day. Remember them in your thoughts and prayers.



For us personally, our next steps seem to be taking us back on land for a while—North American land, at that. We both want to pursue some more education. Katie is looking into midwifery schools, and Jeremy plans to capture his lifelong dream of becoming a pilot. Both of these avenues will take a few years while we work our way through, but after that, we both would like to see where we can use our skills together back out on the field. There will never be a shortage of need for pilots or trained medical personnel who can "Go" directly and work in full-time service. If God will provide the money, as he has so strikingly up till now, that remains our ultimate goal.



Meanwhile, the Caribbean Mercy lies in the harbor, awaiting the workers and the funds needed to sail once again. The present circumstances are difficult, but the future holds hope—and the past is already an eleven-year tapestry of healing brought to those in need. Some numbers:

**Seven thousand people** have passed through the dental clinic.

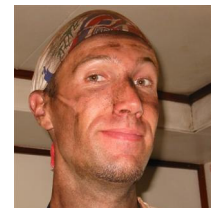
**Thirty-one thousand** have received community health training.

**Thirty-two thousand** have been served by the optical clinic.

**Four thousand** people can now see because of a free eye surgery.

**One hundred sixty thousand people** have heard the good news of a God who loves them, with almost six thousand deciding to become new Christians.

And the crew of the Anastasis carries on with the same ministry in Africa, with the Africa Mercy slated to join the work next spring.



So our time with Mercy Ships has come to a close. But we will never forget what we've seen, or what we've experienced—the friendship of those we've met, or our gratitude for those who have helped and prayed and supported us so that we could go and serve. That's you. Nothing we've written about for the past three years could have been done without your generosity, your faithfulness, and your kindness. God bless you.

With all our love,  
Katie and Jeremy