



KRB Update #2202 – Trip to US / Ebola / Mada Keith R. Brinkman with Mercy Ships 23 November 2014

When I joined Mercy Ships in 1989, it was just prior to my parent's 25th wedding anniversary. I assisted with some preparations for the surprise party but was not able to be there. As we talked about their upcoming 50th anniversary, there was no way I was going to miss celebrating with Mom and Dad. I committed to get from Africa to Florida and bring them to Indiana for the celebration and then bring them back to Florida and then I would return to Africa. The travel arrangements got complicated with the change of the ship's schedule due to the ebola virus disease in West Africa. Though, I made it and we had a great celebration – a family dinner at Jay and Laura's house on the night of their anniversary. Then the celebration at Mark and Lisa's church on Saturday afternoon – many family and friends came to join us in honor and respect for our parents. I am so thankful for all those who participated. We enjoyed the week staying at Mark and Lisa's house and had quality and quantity time also with my nephews and nieces.



Photo: Left to Right – front row – Shelby, Jaylie, Mark, Mom, Dad, Jeremy, Jay, Laura, Victoria, Dustin – back row – me, Evan, and Lisa – taken just prior to the party behind the church with gold leaves as a background just for their golden anniversary.

At the same time of getting ready for the celebration, I was also praying and preparing for sharing at my home church, Indianapolis Christian Fellowship on that Sunday. Our missions coordinator and friend of over 20 years, Allen, prepared some surprises for me, including a skit of my life performed by the children, children parading in with hand created flags from the nations I have visited as a missionary, and after my sharing a prayer of re-commissioning. It was an amazing morning and entire day as we had a luncheon afterwards and later in the evening with a family I have known for 28 years. Nate's daughter mentioned wanting to hear a story about a girl her age in Africa and so I am intentionally keeping my eyes open for a patient who I can share with Sophia about.

A question that came up often while in the US for this quick visit was about ebola and the great impact on our region. As you know, we postponed Guinea that is where ebola started earlier this year and so instead sent our Advance Team to Benin, but then ebola spread in neighboring Nigeria just 60 miles away and so we postponed Benin, and accepted the invitation to go to Madagascar for this field service. Even though we are a hospital ship, we are not able to test for ebola or isolate patients and we don't want to be the one who brings ebola into a country by attracting desperate people. Plus if we had ebola on board we would be ordered to sea for weeks before being considered by any port to come in. Please pray for the people of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia – the stop of new cases and care for those infected for their recovery. This disease was had a huge impact – my friend Robert's uncle got sick and all his family cared for him and they all died. A pastor friend from Guinea was helping to share with people how to stay safe from ebola and false rumors were spread and they were all murdered and left in the ditch – it is serious and huge impact for all involved.

My return journey was 3 but felt like 4 days to my home on the ship in Mada, it is great to be back. After serving here on the Advance Team and imaging the ship in port and now to see it and the arrangements dockside – it is an exciting time. I plan to share much about this nation and its people – I wish that you get to know Madagascar for more than the cartoon movie by the same name. Tomorrow, we conduct our Partner's Reception with guests coming from the local area and the Prime Minister and others from the capital. The hospital is open; patients are in the operating rooms and wards. We shared the story of the Good Samaritan at our ward service this morning. Please pray for the right patients, the participants for healthcare education and that together we may bring hope and healing as we love God and love and serve the Malagasy people.



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