

KRB News

Keith R. Brinkman serving with Mercy Ships on the *Africa Mercy*

September 2011



Greetings from Africa to my family and friends in locations all around the world. Growing up on the West side of Indianapolis, Indiana, I would not have dreamed that I would be living in Africa today. I am thankful to each one of you for your impact and influence on my life.

Since my last newsletter, I spent time in Liberia, Togo, South Africa, Guinea and now in Sierra Leone. I was invited to return to Liberia as part of the evaluation team in April '10. We met with our many partners – in the government, the church, the NGOs, former crew members, day workers and friends there. Much time was spent conducting the evaluation on the two medical clinics and the training projects – community health, agriculture, water and sanitation, mental health, HIV and church leaders. There were times at the end of the day that I felt encouraged, and then other times I felt somewhat discouraged due to the lack of change.

Following a short time back on the ship, I went to serve for nine weeks on the Advance Team in South Africa. Then from September to January the ship was in South Africa. Our primary focus was the generator replacement project, and other critical technical projects needed to be able to more fully utilize the ship for the next twenty years (in particular all the operating rooms and hospital wards). At the same time, I assisted with some of our projects; dental clinic and training with the Department of Health, mental health training with several church associations, and the Mercy Vision eye project.

I am excited for this year; a new country. I am not going to live with regrets like last year - I am involved with our patients in the hospital, with the kids in the orphanage and with our local day workers. Though there are many patient stories, I have selected one; the transformed life of Tamba Komba. Born with bilateral club feet in a remote village in the district of Kono, Sierra Leone, Tamba Komba has had some major challenges in his life. He is currently 13 years old, and from March to August he was with us onboard the *Africa Mercy* and at the HOPE Center. He grew up in a village until the time of the death of his grandmother, and then they moved to the capitol of the district – Koidu. His mother is a Muslim and his father is a Christian and he has three brothers and two sisters. His name Tamba signifies that he is the second born son.

Tamba was born with the birth defect of two club feet – completely backwards. He learned to walk 'small-small', as they say here, but it was difficult. A time came when Tamba's parents heard that a white ship was coming and maybe they would be able to assist their son with the problems with his feet. They made the day long journey to the capitol, though were disappointed when the Mercy Ships crew shared that he was too young for surgery. They would have to wait for another ten years before surgery would be possible.

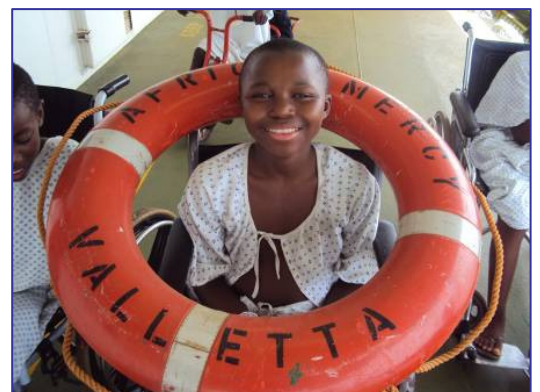
He remembers that when he was about 9 years old, he felt different than the other boys, and some of the children would provoke him and he felt bad and angry. He only knew of one other smaller boy who also had the same problem of club feet.



He attended primary school after they moved to Koidu. His teachers were kind to him. His walk to school was about a kilometer. It was difficult and took a long time to get there. He learned English in school. Currently, he is in class six.

In January of this year, they were excited when they heard the announcements on the radio in their local language and came with high expectation to the government hospital for the possibility of being registered with Mercy Ships. Tamba didn't really feel anything at this time, though that changed as he came to the ship. At first, he was scared to come, as he was not sure what would happen and was somewhat quiet. Though, after meeting the nurses and other crew members, and watching as others went for surgery and returned to the wards, his thinking changed. The Orthopaedic Team used the Ponseti casting method to assist in the initial corrections of his feet.

He enjoyed the opportunities to go up to Deck 7 and be outside and to play there – to watch movies in the hospital wards like *Madagascar 2* and the song 'I like to move it'. During his early days in the hospital wards, I met Tamba and visited him and the other orthopaedic patients almost every day.





The time came for Tamba to receive surgery to finish the correction of his club feet. He was excited but also a bit nervous. Through a sign up system, the crew can register to view surgeries in the operating rooms. I didn't know when his surgery would be, but with a desire to be there for his surgery, I asked for special permission and it was granted. It was absolutely amazing to be there to pray and watch two highly experienced surgeons and OR staff do the life-changing surgery for Tamba. Each surgeon operated on a leg in order to move it into the right direction for the first time in his life. At times, I would hear noises and thought 'oh that has to hurt' but he was well taken care of. In all, the time in the OR was about four hours. Towards the end, it was time to plaster cast both legs. Dr. Frank asked if I would put on gloves and assist with the plastering of his right leg – see photo. He was there to make sure I followed the correct procedures. Once in the recovery room, I stayed with him and spoke to him as he was waking up. Later, he said he remembers seeing me 'small small'.

Due to the inability in the first surgery to get the correct angle, Tamba underwent a second surgery to finish the adjustments. Tamba continued to receive outpatient care and physical therapy while he was at the HOPE Center – just a ten minute walk from the ship at Water Quay.



Tamba was excited and returned home to Koidu to wonderful celebration of his family and friends, as he is walking by himself correctly. He looks forward to returning to school. He wants to continue his education and to get a good job – maybe even one using computers. After feeling much shame, Tamba will return all OK. His only regret is that Dr. Frank shared “*Tamba, you need to wait for 3 years before playing football/soccer.*” His physical body is restored, emotional life strengthened, and he has new input into his spiritual life; a life transformed.



This is a story of one of thousands of patients this year, and one of dozens of patients with whom I have established relationship. I will continue to pray for and, as much as possible, stay in contact with them. As I serve as Programs Administrator here onboard now for over five years, sometimes the number of reports, projects, statistics, finances and other responsibilities can be overwhelming, I am so encouraged when I see lives transformed. I feel my time with the patients is such a vital part of my ministry, and that is why I desire to share this story with you all. I pray that as you read this letter, you know that you are also a part of Tamba's life with your prayers, encouragement and financial support. Thank you.



Serving Together,

Mailing Address: Keith R Brinkman, Mercy Ships,
P.O. Box 2020, Lindale, Texas, 75771 U.S.A.
Email Addresses: keith.brinkman@mercyships.org
& keith.brinkman@yahoo.com
Telephone: +1-954-538-6110
Office #1103 & Cabin #4236
Personal Web Site: www.KeithBrinkman.com

Currently the *Africa Mercy* is in Freetown, Sierra Leone till December 8th, then to Tema, Ghana over Christmas and then to Lomé, Togo from January 5 – June 15, 2012. For August 2012 – June 2013 in Conakry, Guinea.

Ongoing Prayer Requests - Health, our Patients health and their recovery, Safety, Traveling Mercies, Wisdom, Guidance, Divine Opportunities, Understanding of the culture, Learning of the languages, the Opportunities to be His hands and feet extended

Patient Visitation on board the *Africa Mercy* is great – the hospital is just down the hallway from the office and one deck below from my cabin. With the children, we have a great time up on deck 7 getting some fresh air and playing on the ride-on-toys (yes even for those with casts on they want to ride). Those visits are some of my great highlights. I truly miss them when they are preparing to return home.

Support – I serve as a volunteer and am reliant on the support of others for all of my expenses. If you are led to share in my ministry financially, please make checks payable to Mercy Ships and send to: Mercy Ships, Donor Services, P.O. Box 2020, Lindale, TX 75771 with a note designating for the support of missionary Keith Brinkman or online for US and non-US donors at: www.mercyships.org/crewmates and enter my name in the search box.

MISSION: Mercy Ships follows the 2000-year-old model of Jesus, bringing hope and healing to the world's forgotten poor.
VISION: Mercy Ships seeks to become the face of love in action, bringing hope and healing to the poor.
VALUES: Desiring to follow the model of Jesus, we seek to: Love God, Love and serve others, Be people of integrity, Be people of excellence in all we say and do