

Update from Lome, Togo – July 18, 2010

It's amazing how common activities, when moved to a totally different location, can suddenly become adventures!

Last weekend I went with some friends to the market. OK, at home I may go to the store almost every day... no big deal. But it's a bit different here. Though there are a few places in the main market area which we'd recognize as stores, most of the activity takes place in small booths, each of which may sell only one particular type of item. Or, your transaction may take place with an individual who carries her wares on her head through the streets. The photo on the left is part of the market area. If you want an ice-cream, just stop the guy on the right!



Another common activity, going to church, also takes on new dimensions. This past Sunday our choir went to a local church to join with their choir in the morning service (Their choir had come to the *Africa Mercy* to sing with us the previous Sunday evening). So, we all dressed up (yes, even I had to wear a dress!) and loaded up into a couple of our Land Rovers and headed into town. When we arrived, we were directed to a prime parking spot—on the sidewalk across from the church. We arrived just past 8:00, and though the service is said to start at 8:00, there were only a few people there. Those not setting up musical instruments or otherwise preparing for the worship service were in a large circle at the front of the building alternately praying and singing.

Finally, about 8:30, the leader welcomed everyone and we began our praise & worship. This went on for about an hour! The congregation sang, then the *Africa Mercy* choir joined with the church choir and sang, followed by more congregational singing... and dancing. Our choir members were invited (read- you have to do this!) to join in the dancing at the front of the building! (Yes, even I got to "dance") Then there was more congregational singing. When we began singing at 8:30 there were perhaps 30-40 people in the building. By the time we were done there were at least 200! The music and singing were very loud, too, so I guess that was the cue for everyone to get up and head to the church!

The sermon was preached in English and translated into French! At one point all of the first-time visitors, including all of our choir (even if not first-time visitors) were called to the front to

share our name and where we're from. At the end of the service we were asked to wait after the congregation was dismissed and were served a selection of soft drinks.



Finally, on the theme of "little adventures," I went with some friends to the tailor's yesterday. We were probably there for close to 2 hours. Several of the ladies had previously been measured for some dresses, skirts, and tops and another one had purchased some material and wanted to have something made. Although there may be some places where ready-made clothing can be purchased, this seems to be the norm for getting a new dress. Here are some pictures showing how you choose the design of clothing you want and how you get measured for them. Then come back a week or so later, try them on and let the tailor make any needed adjustments. Voila! You just went shopping for a new dress!



Our medical services here are winding down. We have two more weeks of surgeries, primarily thyroidectomies (goiters are very common here and grow to extraordinary size), hernias, and other general surgeries. This past week a fibroid weighing 38 pounds was removed from a lady. I've now had several opportunities to provide blood transfusions for our patients. Here's a picture of me drawing one of our donors. Once collected, the whole blood, which has been previously crossmatched for the patient using a specimen from the donor drawn earlier, is taken directly to the OR for infusion. The other picture is of a patient with a large goiter from last year's outreach in Benin.



I have less than 2 weeks remaining here – time has really gone very quickly. It's been a great time and I feel better prepared to take this ministry on for the long term. My participation in the Gateway training program at the Mercy Ships International Operations Center has been confirmed for September. This program provides important safety training as well as studies to prepare participants for working with the poor in cultures different from our own. It will include a 2-1/2 week field service in Haiti.

Thank you all for your prayers & encouragement.

Claudia

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