

David Gweh

“He will know God good.”

Monrovia | 2 August -- David Gweh isn't likely to forget his time aboard the Mercy Ship. But if he does, his ohma [grandma] Betty will be more than happy to remind him.

David is almost painfully shy, hiding his face in a pillow when he's asked a question. Sitting on the edge of David's recovery bed aboard the Mercy Ship, ohma Betty encourages him to sit up and speak for himself, but the best David can manage is a quick smile and a few mum-

bled words.

Ohma Betty has no such trouble. She's clearly proud of her 12 year-old grandson and happy to describe the way he's dealt with adversity. David has a birth defect, a club foot. But ohma

wants it clearly understood that the problem hasn't held the boy back.

“I praise God because he is a strong

boy, a hard working boy,” she says. “He moves about. He does a garden for himself. He plants small, small things. He plants pepper, cassava, and bitter ball [egg

plant]. His mother sells them in the market.”

She says that David is a typical boy in other ways as well, noting that he's crazy about football [soccer]. “Ball! Ball! Ball!” she says with a smile, rolling her eyes, indicating the game is just about all that David and his friends talk about.

In wealthy nations a club foot would have been corrected soon after birth. But David was born to a poor nation engulfed in a bitter civil war. Fourteen years of fighting destroyed what little medical infra-

structure Liberia had to begin with.

“It was during the war time and there was no place to go,” ohma says, referring to the lack of treatment options when David was born. “We were all in the bushes [hiding in the jungle from rebel soldiers]. We were in the bushes for two years. Some fled to [the neighboring nation of] Ivory Coast. Some lived in the caves. We were so scared because we didn't know where some [family] went when we scat-



tered.”

Ohma Betty was one of those who ended up in a refugee camp in Ivory Coast. Several family members died during the war, but those who survived were eventually reunited in Nimba County, close to the border with Guinea.

Like 90 percent of Liberia's people, David's family are subsistence farmers. They tend small plots of land cleared by hand from the surrounding jungle. Sometimes the harvest is good and they have enough left over to sell in the market. But Ohma says the family had no hope of ever saving enough money to have



David's foot repaired.

“Nobody has money to pay for this kind of work [surgery]. We don't have. It is a great help to the African, even the Liberian. I give thanks to God that you are doing this kind of work and doing it freely,” she says.

Just days after surgery, wearing a cast that reaches from his toes to mid-thigh, David is already up and hobbling around the recovery ward on crutches. The ship's physical therapists are teaching him to walk again.



Ohma's happy with the rapid progress David's making, but believes he's receiving something even more precious than physical healing.

“Because of this he will know God good. He will know the miracle of God. It is better, I would say, even than the medicine. You love the patients. It is so great I don't know how to explain it.

“I will tell my people what I have seen with my eyes; the work of the nurses and the doctors. I will tell them every

day. I'm sure that you are working for God. I encourage you to do more and trust God as you do it.”



Story by Mike Osborne
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August 2, 2007 — Liberia Field Service