

Benedict Menkoah

Liberia Field Service

March - November, 2007

DETERMINATION RUNS IN THE FAMILY

Monrovia, Liberia | 16 July 2007 - Benedict

Menkoah is one tough little boy. But if you think Benedict is tough, wait till you meet his big sister! Determination runs in the family.

Benedict suffered a birth defect that doctors refer to as bi-lateral club feet. In the womb, the boy's feet turned so far inward the toes were left facing each other. His feet also rolled forward, leaving the soles facing upward.

Now nine, Benedict has learned to walk on the curled-under tops of his feet. It's hard to watch him shuffle along. It looks so painful.

But it's clear from the calluses on his feet – rock hard knots of scarred and discolored flesh where the heel should land – that the handicap hasn't managed to slow Benedict down

too much.

His sister Beatrice, 26, says Benedict refuses to surrender to his handicap. She notes his love of soccer by way of example. He continues to play the game even though he rarely gets anywhere near the ball; he runs and falls, gets up again, runs and falls, gets up again.

When he's not playing soccer, he's climbing trees. Perhaps it's more peaceful up there...high above all the people who laugh and call him hook-foot.

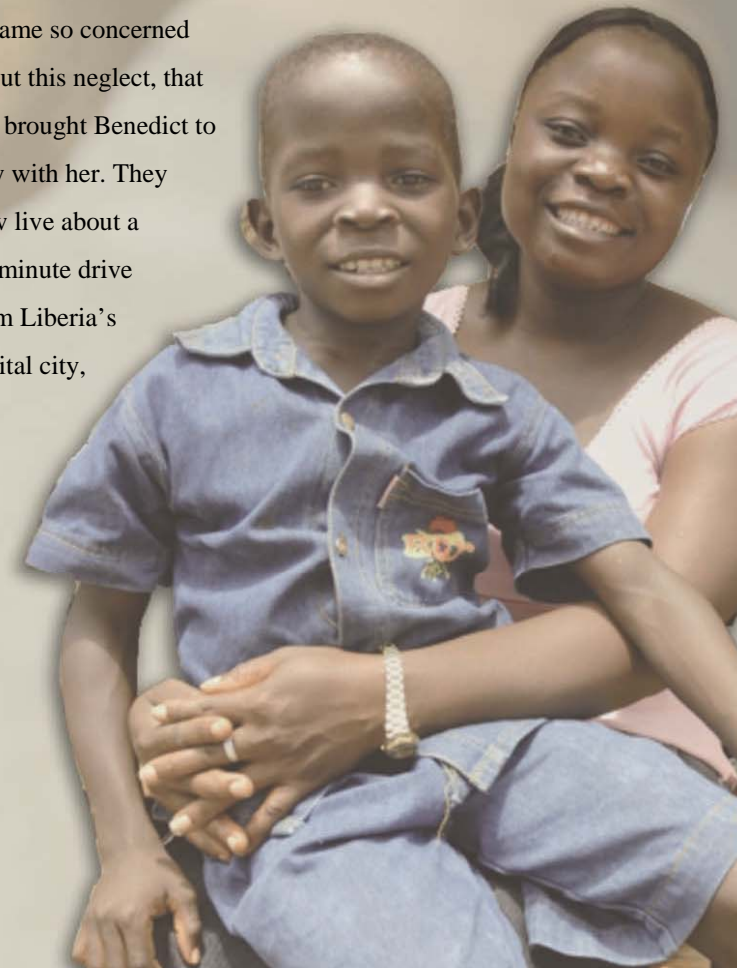
Benedict gets angry when people say things like that. Sometimes he even gets in fights over it.

Beatrice gets a little angry too. When asked to describe what Benedict has endured, her eyes flash fire; she's suddenly talking much louder and very fast. She's especially hurt by the way her family has treated Benedict.

When the extent of his birth defect became clear, Benedict's father lost all interest in him.

Their father has two wives and a total of sixteen children. Benedict is the youngest. When the extent of his birth defect became clear, Benedict's father lost all interest in him and much of the family followed suit.

Beatrice eventually became so concerned about this neglect, that she brought Benedict to stay with her. They now live about a 90-minute drive from Liberia's capital city,



Monrovia, in a small community with the unlikely name of Taste-No-Smell.

In a country where eight people in ten are out of work, Beatrice managed to find a job. She teaches at a school operated by the YMCA of Liberia. She continues trying to better herself, taking computer classes in the evening.

Still, her meager salary would never have stretched far enough to provide corrective surgery for Benedict's feet, so they were both excited when the Mercy Ship arrived in Liberia.

The pair attended an orthopedic screening and Benedict was accepted to receive a free operation on the floating hospital.

As the surgery date rolled around, Beatrice realized she didn't even have enough money for bus fare into the capital. She asked her eldest brother for the fare but he refused. He told her to forget about the surgery and leave Benedict as he was.

But Beatrice was determined and defied her elder brother, vowing she would get Benedict to the Mercy Ships for surgery even if she had to carry him there. Her defiance may eventually prove costly. The eldest brother will become patriarch of the family clan when their father dies.

Beatrice finally talked an older sister into providing bus fare, and Benedict was one of the first patients to receive orthopedic surgery onboard the *Africa Mercy*. An operation to correct his right foot was completed without complication and Benedict spent a few days on the recovery ward.

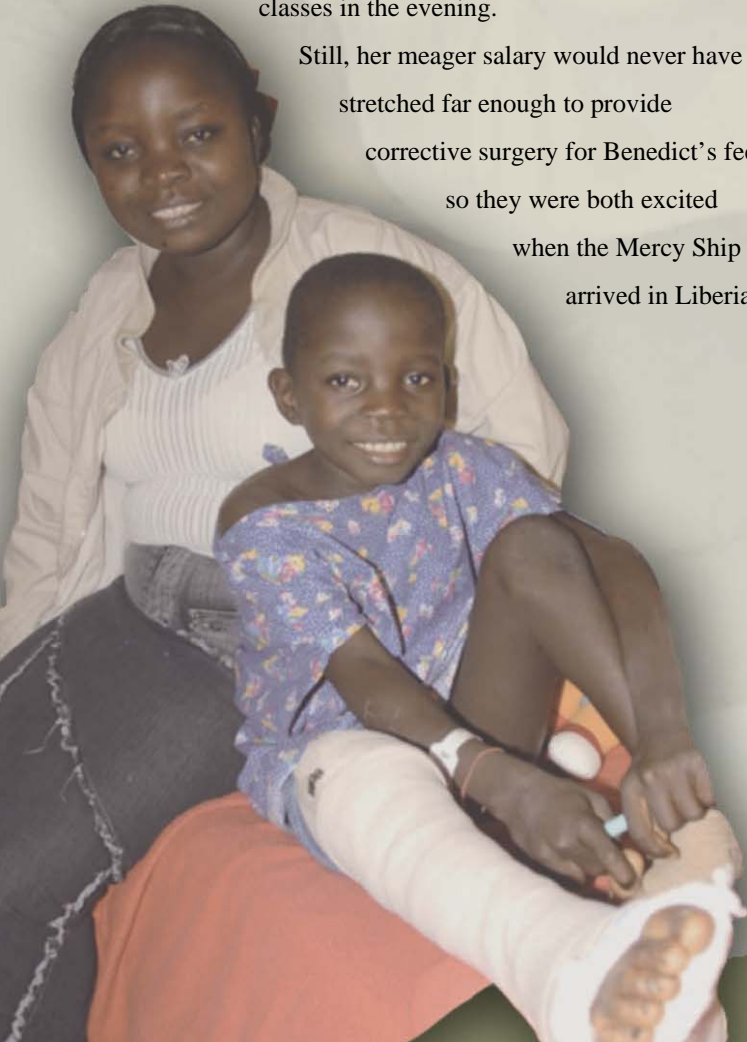
Beatrice said of the free surgery Benedict received, "I couldn't do it myself. I didn't have the means. It was too big. So I say thank you. God bless you."

Benedict is going to need every ounce of his determination to get through the next year. He's working with Mercy Ships physical therapists now to learn how to walk on his newly corrected right foot; a slow and painful process.

Early next year he'll have to travel to the neighboring nation of Sierra Leone, the ship's next port of call. There he'll have the left foot straightened and the process of learning to walk will begin all over again.

But there's little doubt Benedict will succeed. After all, he's just as tough as his big sister.

Determination runs in the family.



www.mercyships.org

© 2007 Mercy Ships International

Story by: Mike Osborne • Photos by: Debra Bell • Design by: Annie Chou

