

She'll
never forget
feeling
beautiful
again.



Jatu

A Mercy Ships life-changing story.



Jatu, age 14

Jatu didn't know how old she was. Her playful grin and, bright pink polka dot nail polish seemed to place her somewhere in the early stages of adolescence.

A young bride, Jatu told how after two years of marriage, she became pregnant, the pride of her parents and husband. But a long, tragic labour left her with a stillborn child, incontinence and despair.

And so Jatu joined the estimated 2 million women in Africa who suffer with the condition known as vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF), a condition in which obstructed labour causes a hole to form between the bladder and vagina. Good obstetric care could prevent it, one simple operation could heal it, and yet most women suffer for decades, silent and alone.

Jatu's father-in-law heard about a Mercy Ship and the possibility of a free operation onboard. After attending the upcountry medical screening in Matru, Jatu received an appointment card and the assurance that the ship could give her the operation she needed. She had hope after only months of living with VVF.

"I was nervous to come to the ship. But I am sure I will get healing here," Jatu said. And Jatu did find healing. No longer incontinent, she left the ship to return to her husband and family.



Give the gift of joy.

Mercy Ships provides more than 500 free fistula repair operations each year for women in developing nations. Your donation makes a lasting difference.



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Now he's
spreading
the word
about
mercy to
others



Patrick

A Mercy Ships life-changing story.



Patrick

Patrick lived with a growing tumour for over 15 years. The tumour began as a tiny spot close to his teeth and became a massive tumour protruding from the bottom of his chin.

Doctors gave him another 5 years to live at most. Then a Mercy Ship came to Sierra Leone in 1992. Patrick received two onboard operations with a promise of additional surgery the next time the Mercy Ship returned.

However, Sierra Leone underwent a lengthy civil war, prohibiting the Mercy Ship from returning until 2000. Word was received that Patrick had been killed by rebels. Imagine the joy when Patrick showed up in 2000 with an incredible story of triumph amidst tragedy. Over the next two years, Mercy Ships doctors performed the final two operations on Patrick.

These operations freed Patrick from his "prison" of hopelessness and gave him joy.

Today, Patrick is married with three children. He is gainfully employed and serves as an Associate Pastor of a Church in Freetown, Sierra Leone.



Help save a life.

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He found
his new
smile on
a ship.



Ali

A Mercy Ships life-changing story.



Ali, age 4

Three o'clock am wasn't too early for Ali to rise. After all, he'd been anticipating the day for months: the Mercy Ships medical screening. The walk from his aunt Hawanatu's house to the National Stadium took only 15 minutes, but Ali's journey had really begun four years ago in the Guinea countryside, when he came into the world with a cleft lip.

Ali became an orphan at eight months of age when his mother passed away from disease. His grandmother took Ali in and even attempted to give him an education, but her good intentions backfired when his deformity quickly made him the joke of the school. Ali refused to go back and subject himself to ridicule.

Ali's situation shifted once again when his grandmother died, and Ali was sent to Freetown to stay with his aunt Hawanatu. It was there that hope first dawned on his future – news had spread of the Mercy Ship's return to Freetown, and his family anticipated that young Ali might be able to receive a reconstructive operation onboard.

Just six days later, having already undergone the cleft lip repair, Ali sat on the ward a changed 4-year-old. Dignity restored, Ali now dreams of becoming a doctor when he grows up, because of the way he saw people treated on the Mercy Ship. But in the meantime, he can simply look forward to being treated like a normal child.



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They'll never forget what mercy looks like.



Assan & Alusan

A Mercy Ships life-changing story.



Twins, age 2

They lived on the doorstep of total darkness. Blinded by cataracts, two-year-old twins Assan and Allusan had never seen their mother or each other. Their eyes were painful to watch, rolling aimlessly in opposite directions.

The boys were born in an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp outside Monrovia – Liberia's capital city where the hospital ship was docked. Their refugee mother, Ellen, originally from Sierra Leone, fled her country's ugly civil war in 1999, only to find herself embroiled in another – Liberia's 14-year-old conflict.

A neighbour in the camp told Ellen about a Mercy Ship that offered free medical care and eye operations.

The boys were screened and scheduled for bilateral cataract operations. A few days later surgeon Dr. Glenn Strauss removed their eye patches for the moment of truth.

The boys could see. They could focus and track. They began exploring a new world on new feet – first in unsure wide circles, a half hour later in erratic, confident lines after each other, their first game of tag.



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She'll never forget what mercy feels like.



Edoh

Edoh, age 16

A Mercy Ships life-changing story.



Edoh, age 9

She was a tiny child with spindly arms and legs and a massive tumour on the side of her face. The renegade mass had shifted her left eye two inches off centre and stretched her mouth to an unimaginable eight-inch diameter. New growth of the tumour threatened a slow and horrible death by suffocation. Edoh's parents, having exhausted every possible avenue of hope, finally gave up and prepared for her death.

Edoh remembers only the blood she would cough up, the difficulty breathing, the fear in her mother's face. She remembers too, the day she was snatched up from the press of a huge crowd and tossed screaming over a steel gate. She landed in the arms of a giant white man and screamed more until she saw her parents. That day, hope returned to her mother's eyes.

Veteran Mercy Ships surgeon Dr. Gary Parker examined Edoh. With the tumour blocking her airway, the first necessity was an emergency tracheostomy to enable her to breathe. Weeks later, she recovered from surgery in the ship's ward, relieved of the horrific growth.

When Edoh returned to the Mercy Ship for a small reconstructive operation seven years later, everything came flooding back. The care, the kindness, the many nurses, the surgeons. Edoh knows that surely she was snatched from death. Today, she is training to become a nurse. She wants to give back what has been given to her.



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One
operation
– two lives
transformed.



George

A Mercy Ships life-changing story.



George, 5 days

Naomi looked like a new person. Three months earlier, when she'd come to the Mercy Ship seeking help, she looked exhausted and heartbroken. But as she prepared to leave the hospital ship, she appeared completely transformed. And she wasn't even the one who had surgery.

Just after New Year's Day, Naomi gave birth to her first child. Unfortunately "Baby George," named after his father, was born with a cleft lip and palate – a common but frightening birth defect.

"I was scared, and I felt bad," Naomi said. Superstitious neighbours gave her reasons why they thought George was born this way: that Naomi bathed at night, that she was a witch. But Naomi sought a better answer, and when her son was five days old, she brought him to the Mercy Ship.

The doctors scheduled him for surgery and told Naomi to take her baby home and help him gain weight so he would be big enough to undergo the surgery. Months later they returned to the Mercy Ship for the operation to correct George's cleft lip. After a four-day stay on the ship's ward, Naomi took her baby home, planning to come back in a year when another Mercy Ship would visit Liberia and George could have his cleft palate corrected as well.

"I'm very happy," a beaming and hopeful Naomi stated as she held her sleeping son.



You can change a life.

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He found
his new
smile on
a ship.

Emmanuel



A Mercy Ships life-changing story.



Emmanuel, age 5

Emmanuel seems a happy, well-adjusted five-year-old, and that's a little strange. Strange because Emmanuel was born with a cleft lip in Africa, a land where birth defects are often considered a curse or the work of evil spirits. Others routinely shun children like Emmanuel, even neighbours and family. That kind of rejection is devastating for anyone, especially a child. Some hide in their homes. Others try to disguise the deformity. Most avoid eye contact and rarely smile.

Not Emmanuel. As he playfully bats a balloon around the Mercy Ship recovery ward two days after corrective surgery, his eyes flash mischief and his laugh is infectious. Emmanuel is aware that he's different somehow. At the age of three he returned home from nursery class and announced that he wouldn't be going back to school. The other children were making fun of his broken lip. Now five, Emmanuel still sucks his thumb, no doubt to mask his upper lip.

When Emmanuel's family heard about Mercy Ships, they feared it was too good to be true. If an ordeal like this hasn't broken Emmanuel's spirit, it's hard to imagine anything that could. So it won't seem at all strange if, in a few years time, we see his happy smile beaming from a magazine cover, presidential podium or the silver screen.



Give someone a new smile.

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He'll never
forget
what mercy
feels like.

Joseph



A Mercy Ships life-changing story.



Joseph, age 32

When Joseph was a small boy, a tumour began growing on his neck. Years later, rebel soldiers stormed into his village killing his parents and friends. Joseph narrowly escaped into the dense rainforest where he waited out the attack. Returning home to the stench of death and tragedy, he wept freely. When Joseph speaks, he begins with a shudder as his facial muscles tense, his eyes squint and his lips tremble. After a moment, sound emerges - halted and pushed. It's hard for people to appreciate just how much Joseph has suffered.

Joseph says his tumour made people afraid of him. He knew for years the only place he could get help was a hospital, but even his wildest dreams didn't allow money for an operation. So Joseph prayed. For about 20 years. He told everyone he was certain one day, he would somehow reach a hospital and have his tumour removed. So last year, when Joseph heard on the radio that a Mercy Ship was coming for the first time to Liberia full of surgeons who gave free operations, he wasn't surprised. Nor was he surprised to learn the hospital ship specialised in the removal of benign tumours.

As he departed the Mercy Ship, Joseph grinned as he planned what he'd say to all those who had doubted him. "I will be feeling happy. I will tell them all God has answered my prayer."



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Her decade
of suffering
was removed
in hours.

Kadiatu



A Mercy Ships life-changing story.



Kadiatu, age 26

In 1992, a cystic tumour began to grow on Kadiatu's jaw. Over 11 years it spread, impeding her speech, pushing out her teeth and causing others to look at her with scorn.

Though she constantly covered her swollen face with a cloth or scarf, the gruesome effect of the tumour kept her isolated. Still, with three small children to care for and a household to run, Kadiatu endured the taunts and pain. "My worry was my mouth," said Kadiatu. "I was crying and thinking, how is this problem going to be solved?"

When Kadiatu heard about a visiting Mercy Ship, she decided to attend the ship's medical screening in Freetown. She was selected to come onboard. Surgeon, Tony Giles removed Kadiatu's cystic tumour and inserted a titanium plate into her jaw. In a follow-up operation, Dr. Giles inserted bone grafts around the titanium plate to solidify the jawbone.

After years of suffering, Kadiatu's life has undergone a remarkable transformation. When a BBC film crew visited the Mercy Ship in Sierra Leone, they featured her in a one-hour production entitled African ER. Thousands of viewers around the world were impacted by her story. After viewing herself in the completed documentary, Kadiatu said simply, "I was surprised, because I saw the big change in me."



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From
malnutrition
to healthy
little boy.



Christopher

A Mercy Ships life-changing story.



Christopher,
6 months

Baby Christopher came to the Mercy Ships clinic in a rural village with his mother, Xiomara. He fell out of bed when he was six months old and quit breastfeeding.

The only thing he would eat was rice water. He could sit up, but could not walk or do other things that babies his age could do. Local doctors told Xiomara that Christopher's delayed development was due to the head injury. But his mother had never advanced his diet from rice water and he was actually starving to death. Dr. Michael Chan realised Christopher was at high risk of death from malnutrition. He quickly developed a menu, urging Christopher's mother to follow it precisely. In two weeks, Christopher's mother brought him to the Mercy Ships clinic again. He had a high fever, diarrhoea and was not absorbing food. Xiomara refused to take him to the local hospital, saying, "Babies die there." Mercy Ships staff gave Xiomara new instructions, more vitamins and an oral rehydration solution.

When Mercy Ships returned to Honduras the following year, a crew member named Chris met a woman from Christopher's village and inquired about him. She said he did not die, but in fact was very well! They hurried to his grandmother's house and hardly recognised the healthy little boy.



You can change a life.

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When a
dream come
to pass



A Mercy Ships life-changing story.



Isabelle, age 10

Ten-year-old Isabelle had a dream that one day she would walk like other children. But how could this dream ever be realised? Isabelle was born with her feet severely deformed and curled under in a condition called “clubbed feet.” She learned to “walk” on the tops of her feet, dragging herself from place to place. The object of cruel teasing, the little girl scarcely lifted her head.

The Caribbean Mercy’s outreach in El Salvador brought the answer to Isabelle’s dream in the form of Dr. Tim Browne. In 1997, the orthopaedic surgeon left his practice to serve full-time with Mercy Ships. Tim brought with him specialised training in orthopaedics and a long-held dream for the Caribbean Mercy – the addition of new types of operations that were previously impossible to perform.

“When I met Isabelle, my heart went out to her,” Dr. Tim said. “I realised that I could help put a smile on her face by doing surgery on her feet.” With long hours in the operating room, Dr. Tim corrected and turned Isabelle’s feet the right direction. Local doctors did additional surgery to finish the work with equipment brought on the Caribbean Mercy.

Isabelle smiles now, her dream has become a reality.



Give the gift of walking

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He'll never
forget what
mercy
looks like.

Benigno

A Mercy Ships life-changing story.



Benigno, age 18

Benigno felt his feet fly out from under him and winced as he hit the ground. Giggling children surrounded the startled and nearly blind eight-year-old as he struggled to his feet. Bilateral cataracts were stealing his sight, and insensitive school children took advantage of his handicap by tripping him and punching him in the eyes. "My father finally took me out of school," said Benigno, "because I couldn't see and the other children mistreated me."

While in the city, he attended church. Compassion for a young blind man with his whole life ahead of him caused the pastor to arrange for an appointment with a local ophthalmologist. The doctor suggested eye surgery might restore Benigno's sight, but the cost would be over £500. For a young man who couldn't work and whose father made £1.50 a day, that was unaffordable. Someone heard the situation and announced: "I heard there's a ship in Puerto Quetzal offering free eye operations!"

Waiting in the line, a crew member noticed the young man and made sure he was examined. After all the tests, Benigno received two surgery appointments, one for each eye. Benigno walks confidently now, without assistance. After his final surgery check up, Benigno pulled his official ID card from his pocket. "It says I'm blind." His beaming smile told a different story.



Give the gift of sight.

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She regains
mobility
thanks to
Mercy Ships.

Kadiatu



A Mercy Ships life-changing story.



Kadiatu, age 23

Kadiatu is a tiny woman with a big, gentle smile. Considering the misery she has experienced in 23 years of life, Kadiatu could be forgiven if she never smiled at all. For almost half of Kadiatu's life Sierra Leone was devastated by a brutal civil war. Thousands were mutilated by rebel soldiers wielding axes and machetes.

To add insult to injury, Kadiatu contracted polio as a child. This horrible disease has long since been eradicated in much of the world, but not in West Africa. Poverty and war insured Kadiatu would not receive the vaccination that could have saved her from so much suffering. It left Kadiatu's limbs shrivelled and her body deformed.

But life goes on and so does Kadiatu. She works as a tailor in the village of Hastings. Only the main road through town is paved. Everything else is dirt and gravel paths. After her old wheelchair broke down, Kadiatu had to crawl along those paths on her hands and knees. What she disliked most of all was begging the local children to fetch her water each day.

Kadiatu learned that Mercy Ships was offering free wheelchairs. She was examined by the rehabilitation team and met the criteria for receiving a wheelchair. The one she was shown had recently been refurbished and sent to Africa. "God bless them," Kadiatu exclaimed in surprise when she was told that the chair had been reconditioned by prison inmates in the UK. Just getting one more of those great big smiles from Kadiatu was thank you enough.



Give the gift of mobility.

Mercy Ships provides more than 5000 free general medical consultations each year for the poor in Sierra Leone. Your donation makes a lasting difference.



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One operation
– a family
life restored



Kumba

A Mercy Ships life-changing story.



Kumba, age 30

In early 2005, thirty-year-old Kumba was the first patient at the Mercy Ships West African Fistula Centre in Sierra Leone. Like every woman at the centre, her story is a unique one and fraught with challenges and hardships, but Kumba also represents how Mercy Ships' services in Sierra Leone radically change lives for the better by bringing hope and healing.

A fistula is a double tragedy. In a country where one in three children dies before the age of five, stillbirth is particularly grim. Compounding this, women suffer embarrassment, shame, and isolation for months and even years. For Kumba, the wait was three years.

In a sense, Kumba was fortunate. In many cases, a woman with a fistula loses her husband, who is her primary source of economic security. Rejected and unable to even enter a market to sell things, she avoids the outside world. Yet Kumba's husband was by her side during the difficult years until her operation.

Today, thanks to the work of skilled Mercy Ships surgeons, Kumba is healed and even has a child. She can walk freely, enter her local market if she wishes, and can live without any shame or stigma. Indeed, she is an inspiring role model for her peers. Sierra Leone is a country with overwhelming challenges and for many, there is great need. But for women like Kumba, there is hope and joy.



Give a gift of restoration

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She'll never
forget
what mercy
feels like.



Mamie

A Mercy Ships life-changing story.



Mamie, age 22

At 19, Mamie was pregnant for the third time. Neither of her previous children survived infancy as both died of fevers. Mamie, still a teenager, went into labour with her third child with the assistance of Traditional Birth Attendants. They gave her native medicines. They pushed on her stomach and reached inside her to pull her baby out.

"It hurts," she told them. They were sorry, they told her, but she had to be courageous. By the second day, Mamie no longer felt her baby moving inside of her. Once the dead child was removed, Mamie woke to find herself lying in a wet bed. Everything was soaked. Mamie was leaking urine. She had developed VVF; a hole had formed in the tissues between her vagina and bladder. Mamie's husband, a farmer, was "disappointed", she said. He took another wife.

Mamie returned to her village to find money and a doctor for a VVF operation. Once she gathered the money, she learned the doctor did not do VVF surgeries; he only knew how to perform C-sections. Her relatives told her they would assist by informing her when a Mercy Ship, which they knew provided free VVF operations, arrived in Freetown. By then, Mamie had been leaking urine for four years.

Mamie recovered on a bed next to another Sierra Leonean woman who also underwent a VVF operation onboard the Mercy Ship. They were struck by the care they received by Mercy Ships volunteers. "You people are doing things without asking for anything in return," she said. "It's wonderful. We have never seen that before."



Help make a miracle.

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“People would stare at me and think it’s horrible.”



A Mercy Ships life-changing story.



Alfred, age 14

When Mercy Ships arrived in Benin in 2005 it was just in time for 14 year old Alfred. Over the previous four years a large tumour had been growing out of his lower jaw, distorting and disfiguring his face. Weighing five pounds, the pink mass by then prevented him from eating and Alfred was slowly dying of starvation.

Bessan, Alfred’s father, a fisherman in their small village, had tried traditional remedies and also taken his son to the nearest hospital, but neither helped. “In my heart, I had given up on this boy,” he said later. Worse, neighbours avoided Alfred, either because they believed his illness was contagious or because they felt so unable to help. Out of shame, the family hid their son away inside the innermost room of their home.



Alfred, age 18

Then they heard about Mercy Ships and, a by now disillusioned, Bessan agreed to take his son to the hospital ship. Alfred’s tumour was quickly removed, with a titanium plate and pieces of his rib used to fashion a new jaw. Alfred was overjoyed, returned to school and grew into a quiet young man with a love of mathematics.

Then, in 2009, Alfred noticed a swelling on his upper jaw. The family knew that Mercy Ships had returned to Benin, journeyed to the ship and saw Dr Gary Parker and other crew who had treated him before. This time a small tumour was removed, but otherwise Alfred, now 19, is healthy and happy. Looking back, Bessan says “People would stare and think it’s horrible. Now I can go out with him proudly. ‘Let’s go fishing,’ I’ll say. And he will do it with all joy.”



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“He found his smile on a ship”



Oumar

A new reality



Oumar,
age 25 years

Oumar Dolo, 25, lives in Benin. For two weeks, he had been experiencing pain in his tooth. He came to the Mercy Ships Dental Clinic for a free examination where he was diagnosed with a tooth abscess, the tooth was extracted, and he went home.

But two days later he was brought back to the dental clinic. Oumar had developed Ludwig's Angina, a bacterial infection of the mouth which can develop after a tooth abscess. His face had become distorted from prominent swelling and deposits of puss. The swelling was occluding his airway; he was losing his ability to breath. Realizing Oumar would die if no intervention was taken, Dental Team coordinator, Jessica Campbell, contacted the hospital staff on board the Africa Mercy.

That same morning Oumar was transported to the Africa Mercy, where he received an emergent surgical irrigation and drainage of his face.

After surgery, Oumar spent several days in Intensive Care, requiring 24-hour nursing care, artificial ventilation, and large doses of antibiotics.

“They placed three drains in his face and kept the breathing tube in for over a week because of the swelling. It was a life or death situation,” said Intensive Care Unit nurse Cassidy Phillips.

Finally after more than a week in Intensive care, Oumar's condition stabilized and he was transported to the ward. A week later, he walked away from the Africa Mercy completely healthy.

Today, Oumar is alive, healthy, and has a hopeful future.

“I am really happy that Mercy Ships was here to help me,” said Oumar.



Give someone a new smile

Since 1978, Mercy Ships has treated more than 95,800 dental patients with more than 228,100 dental procedures performed. Your donation makes a lasting difference.



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“Now she has the chance to see Mercy”



Opening Her Eyes To A Brighter Future.



Josephine, age 6 months

Six-month-old Josephine was born with congenital cataracts in both eyes. The first six months of her life, she has lived in constant darkness. Being blind in any country is challenging, but even more so in developing nations in West Africa, where access to quality eye care is practically non-existent. There are no special schools for blind people, no guide dogs, and no accommodations for people with this disability. With these obstacles, Josephine faced a dark and difficult future. But not any more.

Her mother, Annie, was told that there was a large medical ship docked in the capital that would be able to help her.

Onboard the world's largest charity hospital ship, Josephine received a free surgery to remove the cataracts. But even such a quick operation is not simple on a baby so small, as the eyes are still growing. Little Josephine is actually the youngest cataract patient that Mercy Ships has treated.

In spite of the challenges, the surgery went wonderfully well.

The day after the surgery, the eye mask was removed. The doctor, inspecting her eyes, said, “Both eyes are nice and clear today. There is significant improvement.” It will take between three and five days for Josephine to find her vision, but barely ten minutes after the patch was removed, she was looking around, opening her eyes for the very first time, opening her eyes to a brighter future.

The joy was evident as her mother watched her child looking around for the first time. She said, “I will tell her this story – of how she came to the Mercy Ship and was healed”.



Give the gift of sight

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“From the gripse of death to a new start ...this is Mercy”



Maomai

Saved from suffocation



Maomai,
age 3 months

Baby Maomai was born with a cervical teratoma that had developed into a huge growth protruding from her neck. It started out as the size of a golf ball but after three months the tumour was almost as large as the baby's head.

After a family member heard about the floating hospital docked in Cotonou, Perlagie (the baby's mother) brought her daughter to the Africa Mercy. Seeing the urgency, our medical team prepared Maomai for surgery straight away. But the tumour had made it difficult for her to feed, and Maomai was too underweight to undergo an operation. The Mercy Ships medical team placed her on a feeding programme, postponing surgery for one month.

The day arrived for the operation. It took six hours to remove the tumour, which weighed 375 grams — 15% of her body weight.

Maomai spent over a month recovering in our wards, being fed through a tube to help her regain weight. Since her operation she has grown steadily and gained in vibrancy. She is a real-life example of how donor support works. Had it not been for the generosity of people who haven't even met her, she would have been condemned to a very uncertain future.



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