

e- musing

Sept. 2011

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Can you tell how long the missionary has been in the field by the way they drink their coffee? First year: fly accidentally dives into the coffee cup. The missionary throws out the coffee and make a fresh cup. After a couple of years: fly dives in, missionary spoons out the fly and drinks the coffee anyway. More years later: missionary doesn't spare the fly, but drinks the coffee (plus the extra protein.) If however, the missionary spoons the fly out and instructs it to cough-out the coffee, then you know they have been in the field for too long!

There have been many variations to this joke, depending on what the preferred hot drink is in

the place of service. The truth of the matter is, degrees of tolerance are achieved over time. Objects and situation that shock, disturb, or affect you early on seem to lose their novelty. During my first months here, I was a bit surprised at the inhibitions of women patients who readily disrobe in front of a doctor. Mind you, I still find it amusing that under ware is worn *as is*. I guess it does the job of covering what has to be covered, so maybe they got it right and I'm the backward thinking outsider.

During my first month's working in the OR, I would stop the operation because I could hear noises from above. Much as I'd like it to be heavenly music, I discovered that the noise was coming from the ceiling—it being the hospitable place for creatures like rodents, bats & other winged varieties, termites, and other small creepy- crawlies. The local staff found it odd that I should be disturbed by the noise. I often go to the storage room on the 2nd floor of the OR. Here one needs to step cautiously as the floor boards are termite-infested. One wrong step and you might find yourself dropping down straight onto the OR table, together with the other creatures who might like to tag along!

The hospital structure was built in the 1980's, but partly burned and looted [in 2003] during the civil unrest. It has been on my mind to renovate the OR. If you hear the term "Operating Room", the image of a clean and sanitized area comes to mind. And your mind can even inhale the sterile whiff. Well, not our OR! It's only by God's grace that patients benefit and survive exposure to our OR environment. And before I start tolerating the present less than satisfactory situation, I have taken it upon myself to spear-head the OR renovation project. This project will entail changing the roof and ceiling, replacing the broken window glass and closing off numerous public access areas. The project is expected to cost \$28,000. We have seed money of \$15,000 and we can perform the renovation in stages, starting in December when the rainy season is over. I would like to give you this opportunity to

help the people of West Africa, not just Liberia. Please help us. Details on how your gifts can reach us are below. Ganta Hospital is strategically situated to serve three neighboring countries—Liberia, Guinea and Ivory Coast. Security situation in all three countries seem volatile.

But war or peace, we have Ivorian and Guinean patients. Like the Ivorian boy in the picture with me. He was brought by an NGO working in one of the Refugee camps. He has chronic wounds from multiple bone infections (osteomyelitis). He has had the infection a long time and it had only been treated by a "bush doctor." This boy doesn't speak English and I don't speak French, but we had fun communicating by signs and smiles. The area where we are seated is the OR veranda—cum staff lounge. It's also where we fire up coals to sterilize our sets if the generator fails. Now, about generators: there's a big generator in this mission station that supplies the mission house with electricity—three hours in the morning and three hours at night. From Sept. 1 until the time of this writing, we had no electricity; the generator is decommissioned. I am pressing my clothes in the hospital and may soon be camping out in the doctor's office! I crave for cold water time and again but I'm getting better at moving in the dark. No! I light only one candle by choice.

So here is my own version of the joke at the beginning. I was hungry so I'm making myself a cheese sandwich. I took the cheese out of a Ziploc bag and sliced off a piece and made the sandwich. I was putting the cheese back when I noticed some small, white, wriggly creatures on the cutting board. Hmm... what are those, protein on protein???? I tried to inspect the cheese in the dark. I didn't see any of the creatures, which was comforting. I couldn't see any in the sandwich either. So what did I do? I washed the cheese, patted it dry and put it in a different bag. I made a strong cup of Columbian coffee and enjoyed my high-protein cheese sandwich. It tasted a little different. What do you think? Have I been here too long?

Hee Hee Hee, I will go home next month for a "sanity break." I will be in the Philippines during the Liberia National election; I think it's safer that I'm not here. I will also have the chance to participate in a surgical mission in the south island, and then attend the Philippine College of Surgeons' annual convention. But the highlight will be my mother's 77th-birthday. I will return to Liberia on Dec. 12, Insha'Allah.

With regards to that boy who had artery & vein transection I wrote about last month. After days of agonizing, I decide to amputate his leg rather than lose him to severe infection. It was a sad day for our OR team. But we had to focus on the fact that he was going home alive. Praise God, Handicap International is here in Liberia and can help provide a walking frame and, later on, a prosthesis.

I pray that you can help us with the OR renovation. Please write your check to:

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