

New Vision for Third World Countries

As I sit and watch my suntan fade, I am confident that the memories of my trip will not fade nearly as quickly. In Oct 2011 I travelled to Guinea, West Africa, to assist with an eye glass clinic. This was my second time on a mission trip. There were 5 of us from the Calgary area going to Mamou, a town in the mountainous area in the middle of Guinea. We were going to check people's vision and hopefully find glasses for them, so they could maintain a functional lifestyle.

In this area there is no optometry service, so many people are hampered by poor vision. Of course, many people also have cataracts, or other eye diseases, and we could not help everyone. We did have some good news to relay as we had heard that the Mercy Ship was going to be stopping in Guinea the next summer. This would give the people with cataracts a chance have surgery. Our trip was made worthwhile when we saw the smile on their faces when they could read more clearly, or see well enough to function. All our inconveniences, such as lack of running water, lack of air conditioning, and intermittent electricity, are easily forgotten when you realize that the people you are serving are so grateful that they have been given the means to continue their livelihoods. As an example, we saw a tailor who could no longer see to thread his needles. Now with a pair of reading glasses, he could continue to work. A troubling aspect for us was all the chauffeurs and taxi drivers we saw who had very poor vision, and were still driving without any glasses! The roads were not the easiest to drive on even with perfect vision. There were no streetlights in the towns, and many of the vehicles had poor headlights – or none at all. We did see some cars with no headlights following other vehicles along the roads. We could understand why many crashes did occur.

In February 2010 I had gone on my first mission trip. I accompanied about 60 people to Santa Cruz, Bolivia for a 2 week eye exam/surgery clinic. I went with MMI, who operate in various countries, and specialize in medical ministries. We were there to help the people who could not afford the private clinics and eye surgeries, so people travelled for days to see the physicians and clinicians, knowing there would be long line ups just to get in.

We were greeted at the airport by the media and photographers. This was a second trip to Santa Cruz for the mission, and their reputation was known. Our entire luggage was quickly passed through customs and loaded onto buses (which is almost a miracle in these countries!) Most of us had our second piece of luggage full of needed equipment, such as implants and glasses.

We were stationed in a local maternity hospital, as that was the only place found that was large enough to accommodate all the people, and have access to an OR. All patients were registered, had their vision checked, and from there were sent to the various departments. Some came just to receive new glasses, either readers or prescription glasses. Others came because they had cataracts, and were hoping to get into surgery. Still others came for orbit implants, having lost