

We are continuing to produce extra editions of Educare during this time of global crisis. While we cannot guarantee dates, we are constantly coming across material that we hope will be helpful to our readers, which we will share in these extra editions. This issue contains extracts from a blog entry by a young man serving on the *Africa Mercy*. We have included it because Matthew's experience – including coping with sudden change and goodbyes – could be really helpful for teenagers struggling to come to terms with their lack of closure and the new realities that they face. Reading Matthew's story and talking about it afterwards may provide a starting point for them to begin processing their own situations. He also has something valuable to say about team work.

We have recently been made aware of some really excellent free resources for teaching at home. Although they are based on the UK national curriculum, there are also international resources for other systems such as the US Common Core. One website also offers dual language materials in a range of languages other than English. See page 5 for more details.

A different kind of ship-life, reflection and two decades of life.

Hello. It's me, Matthew Little.

*Matthew has just had his 20th birthday. He has been serving as a deck hand on the **African Mercy**, a hospital ship run by the Christian organisation Mercy Ships, making surgery and health care more accessible to the poor of Africa, for over 18 months. He joined the ship with his parents, Stuart and Lynne, who are continuing to serve in various departments. The ship was based first in Guinea and then in Senegal during his time of service.*

I had honestly felt like that I had written everything that I possibly could have about life on the M/V **Africa Mercy**. [I could] repeat myself by recalling doing the same tasks over and over again, but in a slightly different part of the ship. But now times have changed. I think we all know that.

When the crisis started, Mercy Ships issued a statement:

Therefore, in line with the measures taken by the President of Senegal with the Ministry of Health, Mercy Ships has reviewed the activities associated with the Africa Mercy and has decided to wind down the programmatic operations of our mission in Senegal. [Extract]

And now, we are no longer in Senegal, and we have sailed to Tenerife, where I write now. When we received this news on board, that was when I realised the world had just been turned upside down. And everything on the ship changed.

Already, the world seems a bit less bright. - Joshamee Gibbs, Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest

It was really strange for us on board, looking in, reading the news from back home about how COVID-19 was spreading rapidly around our home countries. We were worried for family and friends back home. I had decided that I would give up Facebook and Instagram for Lent, but then, not knowing exactly who to talk to, not knowing exactly what to ask, who to ask if they were OK, I just wanted to read a message saying "Yeah, I'm ok", I just decided to break my social media fast, just to see updates, to see that they were doing OK. Starting these conversations scared me. But social media updates were just a huge relief. I didn't like deciding to break that fast, but it was worth it, to see that people were OK.

It was also very strange, to read updates and statistics, to think that being so far away from home, where there were no cases in Senegal or Africa *yet*, and to think, we were safe where we were. But then that all changed, hearing about the first confirmed case of Senegal, reading that the World Health Organisation had declared Covid-19 as a pandemic, and suddenly, shore leave had been stopped, and we would prepare to sail away to safety as soon as possible. But where was safety? Covid-19 was everywhere. It was the most unexpected thing in the world, and it was scary. For all we knew, we could be sailing out of Senegal, with no clear destination, stuck, out at sea for who knows how long.

No matter, to be given that amount of responsibility was an incredible honour, and I am very glad to have been able to do that. During my time with Mercy Ships thus far, I have had the opportunity to do many cool and different tasks working in the Deck department. To look back on my time, months after finishing school, doing things such as operating a crane, operating a forklift, being a team member on mooring operations, night patrol duties, keeping lookout for the safety of the crew and the patients we care for, while they all rest; assisting with container operations, and steering the ship. If you look at Mercy Ships and wonder "*How does this help to bring hope and healing and*

life-saving surgeries?" I sometimes ask myself the same question, but watch your favourite film, watch the credits..... you find that a film is more than just the actors and actresses, directors, producers and writers. A whole, sometimes global team work to bring entertainment together. It's the same way with Mercy Ships. We need staff to cook and serve the food for the crew and patients, to give them sustenance, strength and to keep us healthy, housekeepers to keep the ship clean, and the crew healthy. The plumbers to work on the vacuum system and make sure the toilets are working. Engineers and electricians to keep the lights on and power running. Information Services to give us internet. The team in the only Starbucks in Africa to give us our caffeine and waffles. Transportation and maintenance to keep the vehicles and off-ship facilities running. The deck department to make sure that the ship is strong enough and in the right condition to keep the ship sailing, and to continue bringing hope and healing. I am sure I have already written about how the jobs we do on deck help, such as emptying the containers of the medical instruments and equipment, moving into another container, lifting that container on board, emptying the container, for medical supplies to provide for the operating rooms. It may not be on the front line, but the fact that I can say that I have supported bringing hope and healing with the work I do on board, all before I was twenty years old, is a very cool thing.

What has happened? Why is the world so new?

Right now, the ship is docked in Tenerife. In quarantine. For about two weeks. But when that two weeks is over, we still have to follow the Spanish regime of lockdown. So we don't actually know the next time when we are free to leave the ship and explore. It is a stark contrast to ship life a little over a month ago. It already feels like months ago when shore leave was restricted, and the priorities of the ship changed. It all happened so fast, over a weekend. Going from "*We are going to continue bringing hope and healing in Senegal until we are due to leave*" to "*We are going to get ready to leave as soon as possible*" in under two days was a surreal thing. For a few days after we received this news, I sensed a very different vibe on the ship. It was a vibe of sadness and confusion. The next few weeks were like looking through a dirty window, and no-one knew what was going on anymore. Then began a slow, mass exodus of crew, desperate to get on the last flights home before borders closed and charter flights became available. They were bittersweet farewells. On one

hand, they may have been final goodbyes, depending on plans, then that might have been the last time we would see them again. I can personally put faces and names to some of these people. I am due to leave the ship (hopefully, in August), saying goodbye to crew who I know would be returning to the ship once this whole COVID thing blows over. I may never see them again if they return unexpectedly later than I leave. But on the other hand, they left to go back home to help fight COVID in their own countries, using their skills and gifts when they can't use them now. Or they left because they recognised that we needed a certain number of crew onboard to sail, and they wanted to reduce numbers. They made sacrifices, and we are truly thankful for the sacrifice and hard decisions they made to return back home whilst this was going on. It was just a fast push to get the ship ready to sail, breaking the dock down, bringing everything on deck, tying it all down, cleaning and securing. I don't remember leaving Guinea in the same way last year. Leaving Senegal just felt like a huge rush, we were evacuating, leaving for uncertain safety. Whereas when we left Guinea, we knew we were leaving, and we knew where we were going. And we had done all we had done, in Guinea, we had finished. But we left Senegal with unfinished business. We also couldn't say goodbye to our deck day crew. Only about 50 essential day crew were allowed to live in our tents on the dock, the ward day crew, housekeeping, the engine control watch keepers assistant and galley staff. We didn't want to break our quarantine bubble. But, the men whom I had spent about 8 months working alongside, whilst teaching each other about our respective cultures, growing in friendship and respect, working together, even with big cultural and personal differences. I am truly glad to have worked with them. And also sad that there wasn't any closure. We celebrated with the day crew from Guinea, having food together. We couldn't do that this time. I wish we could have. I may not see them again. Going from working in safety and out of reach from the disease to "*We are unable to continue, we don't feel safe here anymore*" was a strange thing, all around.

And now, my plans, during a time where nothing is certain to happen anymore. I have always been fascinated by history and artefacts from history. So, I have plans to return back to the UK later this year (hopefully) and start a four-year course studying history and archaeology. I believed coming to Mercy Ships this past year-and-a-half was my calling, but it has only been my calling for the past year-and-a-half, and a few more months. It's roughly 3 months off two years.

I am certainly happy with what I have done during my time, and I have done things I never would have expected to be doing, during my late-teens. I have met people, and become friends some of the most extraordinary people I have ever, or will ever meet, that I wouldn't have if I hadn't come. Those people are both the crew on board, and also the African day crew. So I wasn't ready to face university a year and a half ago. But I have spent a year and a half helping to bring hope and healing in a completely different continent.

Matthew Little - **Diary of a Deckie Saturday 18th April**

Resources for teaching at home

A colleague from another agency recently recommended two websites to help with teaching children at home.

Twinkl <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/>

This website contains comprehensive downloadable resources for children aged 4 to 16 (Early Years to Key Stage 4 in the UK system) for every subject area. There is also a parents' page with advice and support for home schooling. The EAL (English as an additional language) resources include bilingual material in languages such as the following: Afrikaans, Arabic, French, German, Hindi, Mandarin, Portuguese, Spanish. The international page has links to the U.S. Common Core, curricula from Australia and New Zealand, and IB.

Hamilton Trust <https://www.hamilton-trust.org.uk/>

This website also provides hundreds of free resources for learning at home, using the English National Curriculum. There is also a series of helpful videos by Professor Ruth Mертtens:

<https://www.hamilton-trust.org.uk/blog/homeschooling-help-videos/>

on subjects such as these: home schooling advice for parents; how to support reading and writing; encouraging children who struggle with maths.

Gill Bryant

Educare is a ministry of WEC International.