



Journal from Wings Liberia Trip – January 2020

Journal Entry – January 5, 2020

Mary Briggs and I left Albuquerque on United Airlines at 5:35 am on Jan. 2. We flew to Houston, Washington, DC, and then on the Brussels, Belgium. In Brussels we met up with Kristen Johnson and Brian Johnson (not related) as they had flown from Denver, where they are from, to Newark and then on to Brussels.

In Brussels the gate agent made me check my carry-on bag. There would have been plenty of room, but I didn't want to argue, and I knew we were flying to Monrovia, so I figured my bag would be safe.

I haven't flown internationally lately and was surprised that even though we were in-transit, we still had to clear security again. It took us about an hour to stand in line behind other passengers and have our bags checked again. (Because of the lack of high security at some airports, they make all passengers clear security for everyone's sake. I understand it, but it sure makes traveling a challenge.)

We flew from Brussels to Sierra Leone, a country just north of Liberia. I didn't sleep much, or at all really, so part of the way I worked on Wings photo collages and comments from 2019, but also looked out the window some. We flew over snow in mountains, it seemed for hours over desert and land that had no roads and certainly no towns that I saw. It was very desolate country. Then we flew over the ocean, and it was getting dark by the time we landed in Sierra Leone and it was strange to be flying on a wide-body airplane into an airport that looked so dark. Only once we landed, I did see a few lights. (I found out that many African communities don't have electricity, so even though it looks dark and seemed that no one is around, there were probably many people living near the airport.

We were about 1.5 hours late arriving in Monrovia. Again, it looked very dark around this large capital city's international airport. We departed, went through passport control, and to my utmost delight, when we got into the baggage claim area, there was Raymond to meet us!!!! What a surprise! We hugged and hugged, and then he helped us with our bags. Poor Brian kept looking for his two checked bags, and after every bag had been unloaded, we realized his bags were not there!

He made a lost baggage claim, and by the time we were done, we were the last people to leave. We had gotten to know the Customs people by this time, and one of Raymond's brothers worked there too and we met him, so we were able to walk through Customs without any further delay.

To our amazement, in the dark, holding up a Wings For LIFE International Liberian banner, were about 18 Wings team members, all in their Wings' shirts! They were across the road, so I went to get out my camera to get a picture of all of them, and when I opened my "carry-on bag" that I was forced to check in Brussels, I found the camera gone!!!! I couldn't believe it! The bag, the chargers, and I think everything inside the camera bag was there – everything BUT the camera! It had to have been stolen at the Brussels airport when they screened my bag!

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I knew I had to go right back inside the airport, even though the whole Wings team was waiting for us. I walked back into the Customs area, with people telling me I couldn't go back, and showed the agents my empty camera case. We found the same agent who had done the lost bags report for Brian, and now she had to list a stolen camera as well!

But I didn't let that dampen my spirits – it only deeply disappointed me, because now we couldn't get all the great shots I wanted of the Liberian Wings team.

Thank heaven for cell phones! Soon everyone had a cell phone out, we all greeted and hugged the team, and then to my surprise a reporter from the national Liberian TV station was there and wanted an interview! Raymond had also arranged for that!!!!!! (He's one amazing man, I have to tell you!)

So we had an interview, outside under one of the few street lights at the airport, and were interviewed there, after 37.5 hours of traveling, looking lovely, but with the greatest joy in my heart to be in Liberia and to be welcomed in such an amazing way!

I was deeply touched and moved by the hearts of so many Liberians, ones I hadn't even gotten to know their names yet. I knew God has called us to this special country, with such a dedicated caring leader named Raymond, and as I write this, I'm tearing up to even try to explain what love we all felt!

We got to the hotel after midnight last night, as it was at least a 45-minute drive from the airport to the hotel. We checked in, Mary and I shared a room as they didn't have 4 rooms available, even though Raymond had reserved the rooms for us, took a hot shower, and I collapsed into the bed that we shared. It had been a long two days!

We got up about 7 hours later as Raymond was coming to get us after we had breakfast. We decided to check on a hotel that was close by, but less expensive than the one we were at. It was right on the lagoon, and we could see the ocean and lovely beach. The grounds were much nicer, but we found another hotel nearby that was cheaper. We checked in, moved all our 50# bags to the hotel, and headed off to Raymond's home and the Liberian Wings For LIFE International office!

Raymond's home and his office are in a small "compound". There are locked metal gates, wire around the top of the buildings and fence, and inside were 10 Wings team members, ready for training. Amazing!

First everyone introduced themselves and shared what brought them to Wings. I was the last so shared my story with everyone. Then I went through the Wings' training PowerPoint presentation that I share with new volunteers in the U.S. When we came to the 40 Asset training, Raymond found plastic cups for us to use. I divided the group into 3 teams, and they learned all about the Assets, just like I do in the prisons or at Wings For L.I.F.E. (WFL) They loved it, and they really got the concept that the more "Assets" or "cups" one has, the stronger they are and the more likely they are to withstand the "winds of life".

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I had lost all concept of time, as my Fitbit hadn't changed with the 7-hour time change, and I could have talked for hours more probably. It was so wonderful to have such an engaged, caring audience. But Raymond's wife, and other "cooks behind the scene", had prepared a delicious fish stew, Pepper Soup (a hot soup that was spicy and so good), and everything went over a large helping of rice. We got into groups of 8, invited Raymond's children to come and eat and talk with us in our groups as we do at Wings' programs, I gave each group the following discussion topics: Share something that you will tell your friends and family when you go home about the training and share any new insights that you gained from the training.

I found out later through discussion that Liberians usually don't talk at all during meals. Often, they don't eat together either, so learning about the importance of not only eating together, but also including the children with the mealtime, was something that they all were excited to learn and try in their own homes.

It's getting late and I'm getting tired. So, I'll quickly finish the rest of our day. Raymond drove us around Monrovia. It's a city with half of Liberian's population living here. There are lovely homes, beautiful government buildings, the President's Palace which is huge and is being rebuilt because of a fire, and the city of course sits at the edge of the ocean. BUT – there are also slums, South Beach prison which we were visit one day, which is also at the edge of the ocean, located right in the city. The vendors in the streets, the traffic congestion, is typical of what I have seen in Kenya. It is one bustling, busy city.

We found out tonight there is no hot water and no sink in the room, but I took a cold shower in the shower area, washed my clothes in a bucket they gave me, boiled water for us to drink in our new electric hot water kettle, and have finally some time to write this email.

Most importantly, as I go to bed tonight, I am GRATEFUL for the incredible, loving Liberians we have met already. We have been welcomed and treated as royal guests. I know God has called us here to learn about them and their cultures, but also for us to share the things I have learned the past 25 years doing Wings, and then also for our amazing team members to share them with as well.

Prayers and love,
Ann

Journal Entry – January 6, 2020 - Monday

Yesterday was Sunday, and what an exciting day we had! First of all, we were invited to worship at two church service – one, a church literally next to the ocean. When I looked out through the brick, I saw the beach and the ocean.

The name of the church is the International Fellowship of World Changer. The church was beautifully decorated. They had a Christmas tree, lights around the pulpit platform, and a balloon decoration with Christmas lights strung through it, that was so pretty.

The mural on the back wall was of the world, and I was surprised that they showed North, Central, and South America, and then Africa as well. Silhouettes of people of all colors surrounded the globe, were holding hands, and everyone was carrying a cross. There was a dove

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of peace and symbolism of light, indicating the Light of the World. Pastor Rev. Harris Mulbah was a fabulous preacher who talked about love and grace and forgiveness. What a message to start the new year off with!

The service started at 8:30 and we got there a few minutes late. The choir was already singing, but there were only about 30 – 40 people there. They use plastic chairs for seats and there were literally probably about 200 empty seats in the place. What was so interesting was that one by one, the seats started filling up, and by about 9:30 or so, the church was packed!

They speak mainly English in Liberia, so we can understand them generally, but they do have an accent (reminds me of Jamaica sometimes) and sometimes I'm not sure what they have said. They also have many different "county dialects" and it was fun to have some of our friends talk in their Native tongue for us.

The singing reminds me of course of the African American churches I have visited in the U.S. The singing is full of joy, often dancing, the choir leader often sings something, and the choir responds, and it was VERY joyous!

Each service was 3 hours long, but they were so joyous and so much fun to witness and be a part of, that the time passed quickly.

One of my biggest surprises was when they did the offering. People processed forward and literally were dancing as they came forward to give. We thought everyone in Liberia was VERY generous, and yet we found out later through discussion that giving, and donations are unusual due to lack of finances, resources, and ability to give. But moral support is very common. Then even more surprising after the first offering was taken, which was taken in a large 4-legged aluminum 15" x 24" box, then people continued to come forward throughout the entire service leaving cash donations at the foot of the podium where Pastor Joseph Richards, also a Wings Board Member, was preaching.

We found out that the most donations are given at the beginning of the year and more people come to worship then, and gradually the attendance drops off. The women are the constant attendees all year long. They also attend Wednesday night and Friday prayers and bring their children with them.

You won't believe how people dress up for church. It looked like they were going to a wedding. The dresses were absolutely gorgeous. We asked the pastor's wife where we could find a pretty dress like hers. She said she picked out the fabric, came up with the design, and then a seamstress made it for her. WOW – the dresses were stunning. I don't think I'll come home with a gorgeous African dress 😞

The men too were dressed up! They had sport coats, tuxedo jackets, Raymond wore a sport coat and white shirt with a red bow tie, and many of the men had custom-designed African shirts that they too had come up with the fabric, and the design they wanted. It was a fashion show to behold! Thank heaven we had our plain white blouses and very plain black shirts, but at least we weren't in t-shirts and slacks. Poor Brian was in his red Wings shirt as his suitcases had not arrived yet.

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Joy of Christ Church, pastor Joseph's church, had plastic chairs for some of the congregation, and the children, and others sat on boards placed on bricks. Moms held their babies, and it was such a joy to see so many praising and worshipping together.

The choirs were amazing. They sang with their hearts, each church had great sound systems, often soloist would lead the choir, and then the choir would sing and sometimes lead the congregation. No one had music. All songs were memorized. My choir director Matt would have loved it!

Pastor's Joseph's message was all about call and purpose in life. It sounds like a Wings lecture about using your gifts, getting a job, and making a difference in our world. I loved it!!!

Lunch discussion – written by Lawrence Makor

Raymond informs Wings team that a scholarship and one acre of land was given to WINGS Liberia Chapter and someone just showed up for one of the scholarships. He equally says that there is a vetting process that has been put place for applicants to go through before being offer the scholarship. Raymond equally said that an applicant who is accepted on the scholarship has to paid US \$ 125.00 for registration and the tuition and rest of the other fees are free of charge. Ann again: Raymond also informed us that Wings had received 50 scholarships for children, grades 1-12, can go for \$20,000 (\$100 U.S. year) vs. the normal price of \$50,000 which is \$250 U.S. to Christian Faith Mission School System.

Otila Statement: *It's my first time and am excited about going into the prisons. Thanks for coming and you all are welcome.*

Samuel's: *It's unique to package what you have as a gift before giving it out. We did a great job.*

Kristen: *I hope that each facility uses the gifts wisely and I wish we had more.*

Rita: *Thanks for the gifts that we are going to give out, and I wish each facility or group we are going to give it to use it wisely. Thank you and thanks for coming.*

Note: Twelve (12) persons helped to package the supplies for each facility. 450# pounds of assorted items were brought in from the U.S. as supplies.

Journal - January 5, 2020

Yesterday was Sunday and it having to be first Sunday of the year 2020. We were invited to attend two services – the first service at the first church started at 8: 30 and is located on Congo Town Back Road. The second service at the second church started at 11 am in GSA, Zumba Town Community, Paynesville. The church is Joy of Christ Evangelistic and Deliverance Ministry and the Pastor is Called Joseph G. Richards. He is also a member of the board.

The church is undergoing construction and is yet to be completed. It's being built with bricks and cement. The Church has no cement nor tile floor and no electrical appliances. They used plastic chairs for seating. In the service, we sat in the front row as we watched the pastor preach. The choir was amazing. They were beautifully dressed in black and white and sang throughout the service and other officials performed activities during of the service. Before Pastor Richards' sermon, we were called out and introduced to the congregation and given the opportunity to

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talked to the congregation. In our remarks, we thanked the pastor and the congregation for the warm reception and for working with Raymond as we briefly explain our mission and vision to the congregation. Pastor Richards preached on the theme “Understanding your Purpose”. In his sermon, he told the congregation that everything in life starts with God and ends with God. He encouraged the congregation to discover their God-given purpose and find something to do and stop sitting around and not doing anything. He said Christ blesses hands that work and not lazy ones. After the service, we met with the board chair and briefly chatted and took group pictures.

In the evening hours, we had a meeting with some members of the board including the board chair. I (Ann) explained to the board the vision and mission of Wings and why we had come to Liberia. In return, the board explained to us about their workings and why they have joined Wings.

We just came back from St. Francis Assisi Medical Center. We walked there from Raymond’s home. We saw families outside, children playing, laundry on lines, and some clothes drying on the ground on dirt piles. We saw a water well that no longer works because of the pump situation, but also a water pump that was a community pump, but it was locked. On the way back we went to the local water “bagging station”. They had 3 machines that purified the water, but also bagged up about 8 oz, or one cup per bag. A bag of 30 water sacks cost L. \$100 which is about \$.50 U.S. Each person averages about 10 sacks/day.

At the hospital we met owners Andrew Tulay and his wife Musu. They started the clinic in 2008 but Andrew has been doing medical work for 30+ years. He currently is on the Liberian Dental and Medical Board and there are 822 medical facilities throughout Liberia. Andrew was very involved in the Ebola crisis and met many nurses and medical practitioners and volunteers who contracted Ebola and died. Thank heaven he survived.

They started in a very small 6-room building and over the years have expanded to a 2-story, and at least 6 double-bed rooms, a delivery room equipped for four expectant mothers, one surgical suite, inpatient and outpatient pharmacy, with their motto or belief being they are to treat, and God heals.

Often patients can’t pay, but they do their best for them regardless. Dr. Tulay told stories and showed pictures of women who had been pregnant and had to undergo extensive surgery to remove massive uterine tumors while being able to maintain the pregnancy and deliver a full-term baby! He also conducted life-saving surgery on a woman with an ectopic pregnancy, not knowing that it was actually a twin pregnancy. The woman returned to the clinic with gastrointestinal pain several months later and all were excited to deliver a healthy full-term baby! He showed other photos of successful bowel resection surgeries – so many successes that it has proven God’s mighty hand at work! They truly do provide the care and God provides the healing! And all of this on a volunteer basis. No one is turned away.

We just had a delicious lunch made by Satta, Raymond’s wife. We had rice, “country beans” and Palm Butter Soup with real chicken feet and crab, with dried bonnie.

At 6:00, when it gets a little cooler, we are going to go out into Raymond’s neighborhood and play games, teach songs, and do a bible story – Noah and the Ark. Currently it is 84 degrees,

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the low will be 78 degrees today, and the sun will set around 7:00 pm. There is a 7-hour time change from Albuquerque to Liberia.

Debrief from 1st outing to Raymond's Neighborhood by the YMCA Center 01-06-20

1. Estimated crowd from 150 – 200
2. Ages infants in arms but 2-year old's through 14 and then older youth and adults who we talked into joining us
3. Everyone wanted to be involved
4. Kids ran to get their friends
5. Passers-by joined in and parents came
6. Everyone was very curious to what was going on
7. A mother handed her several month-old baby to Kristen and she held her the whole time
8. When they sang, they did a good job and catch on quickly
9. Mary noticed that some of the children who we had passed by or met on the walk to the hospital had come to join in
10. Children crowded in so much that we had to put them into a circle to teach more songs
11. Children frequently hit and pushed one another so Raymond and the team have a lot of discipline to teach
12. In schools they say, "Finger to your lip." We will teach that and then raise a hand.
13. We need to find a quiet (as much possible) place to meet
14. Put children according to their height, birth month, house color, hair, dresses, pants, t-shirts, Shorts, long pants
15. Each team takes responsibility
16. Ideal – start with games, then singing and lastly bible story
17. Need a microphone
18. Look for soccer field or quiet area
19. Team feels when we go back everyone will want to join us again
20. Hold hands – hold your arms out – sit down

Journal Entry – January 7, 2020 – Tuesday Visit with Prison authorities, 1st Prison and 1st Orphanage

Wow – we've had another amazing day. I'm trying to type this up quickly as I'm tired and want to go to sleep but want to send updates if I can each day.

We started out this morning with a meeting with the top prison authorities in Liberia, at their country headquarters in Monrovia. I don't know how we could have been better received. Raymond had already met with some officials and had already received permission for us to visit the prisons. Two of the top officials were named Col. Samuel Tarley, the Coordinator of Prisons Bureau of Corrections & Rehabilitation and Sheriff Ballah Massaquoi, Deputy Director of Prisons. There were six top officials who ended up meeting with us for 1 hour 20 minutes! I was very impressed that they gave us so much time!

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They told us about their prison systems, introduced themselves, and we found out one of the leaders had spent 16 years working in Pennsylvania. Small world. After they shared, then Raymond shared about Wings For LIFE International Liberia (WFLIL) and then I shared our purpose for coming to Liberia and desire to help.

They have many rules similar to the U.S., and of course follow strict security guidelines. They were cautiously interested in our prison family days, as they have never, (like many U.S. states) allowed inmates, family members, and volunteers all in at the same time to do a family day. For those of you reading this who are prison officials, I'd love for you to comment back to me so I can share your perspectives with the leaders here. I believe they will try hosting a prison family day in one of the prisons as an experiment, and indicated that if all went well, perhaps they could expand to other prisons.

The Director of Rehabilitation will join us when we go to the large (1300+ inmate prison) in Monrovia if possible. He, along with all the leaders, want to cut crime, teach responsible behavior, and help stop the generational cycle of incarceration. We are all on the same page! We left taking photos, the Col. Wanted us to send him an MOU, and it was a VERY positive meeting!

I believe it took us a good 2 hours to get to the prison in Kakata Prison Center. The officers were very professional, but also very kind and helpful. We had to sign in, just like we do in other prisons, and then were escorted to the men's unit first. There were 3 pods on the right, and 2 on the left. We were asked to talk with all the inmates – 151 male and 9 females. I asked each of the first 3 pods of men to be quiet, and Raymond and I stood in front of the middle unit. The men were very quiet, and first Raymond explained who and what WFLIL is and does, and then I shared. Other team members (8 total Liberians and 4 total Americans) stood in front of the other pods so the men could see us through the bars.

First, I taught them a fun song – Allelu- allelu- allelu alleluia, Praise Ye the Lord. Half the room stands up to sing Allelu, and then the other half responds with Praise Ye the Lord. They loved it and it was so much fun to see their smiling faces, laughter, and hearing all 3 pods singing together.

Next, we sang “Shake a Neighbor’s Hand”. They first shook hands, then have a high 5, then patted each other on the back (legal hug) and lastly looked one another in the eyes singing, “Jesus is a friend, he’s the friend next to you.”

Afterwards, when I asked the Superintendent (Warden of the prison) if he thought we had made a difference, he said, “YES! It was like you were counseling all of them.” (And that is indeed what we were trying to do.)

Next, we went to the left 2 pods of the men's prison, and basically did the same thing. Raymond always closed us in prayer. One inmate asked a question at the end – “How can I get involved when I get out?” What a positive, thrilling comment. Of course, we told him how to look on-line and find Raymond and WFLIL.

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Lastly, we went to the women's unit. The ladies came out on the steps and the team dramatized the Bible story of Jesus in the boat, calming the storm. The ladies were the boat, and some were the wind and waves, and everyone was laughing and having a great time. When the disciples woke up Jesus (Raymond), and he stood up and said, "Be still!" to the wind and waves, we talked about the storms in people's lives, and how Jesus can and does calm those storms.

Then we presented some gifts to the prison staff. ***Faith Comes by Hearing***, headquartered in Albuquerque, has translated the Bible into close to 300 languages. Then they record them, with excellent readers, and put the Bible on to a Proclaimer, which has a solar powered back, as well as an electrical powering ability. Raymond asked for the Bible in English, as most Liberians speak English. (Each county also has its own native tongue, but the common language is English.) the prison AND inmates were thrilled to get a Proclaimer. We suggested they put the proclaimer in front of each pods door each day so they could all hear the Bible. They seemed very excited about this.

Next, we gave them a hardcover ***Guideposts Daily Devotional***. Guideposts has graciously sent us materials for the past 25 years and sent us 25 devotionals to give away in prisons, hospitals, orphanages and places we visit. In Kenya the inmates passed the devotional to each pod each day, so the entire prison system was reading the same daily devotional. We suggested the Liberian prison officials do the same thing. I sure hope they do!

Another ministry in Albuquerque provided us with packages of seeds for tomatoes, okra, cucumbers, cabbage, and 3 other seeds (too tired to remember all of them) to give away to places where we visit. They gave us enough seeds to feed 5,000 people after the first planting!!! We gave an assorted package of all the seeds to the officials and we took a picture in front of a plot of land that looked recently tilled and ready for planting. The Superintendent said that inmates help with the planting, and we encouraged them to plant the seeds, each the food, but same some of the seeds for future planting and to give inmates seeds to go home, so they can help feed their families.

We also had toothpaste and other assorted gifts. The prison staff was pleased, and we thank all our donors for all the gifts given to us to give away.

Next, we went to an orphanage where 45 children of all ages were housed. It was attached to a school. A woman and her husband started the orphanage, and unfortunately her husband passed away recently, so we pray that she can continue her powerful work and ministry to the children. We left there and drove another 3 hours to where we are tonight. We found a guest house for the 4 Americans, and the Liberians are staying with relatives from the area. We all ate a delicious dinner of "Pepper Soup" and rice – the soup had beef and beef hooves in it, we pulled 3 tables together, and shared about the day.

What a blessed day! We boiled our water to fill all our water bottles (we can't drink the water here and must boil it.) We all sure will appreciate clean, drinkable water that comes out of the tap, when we get home. There was no shower head in the bathroom. There is a faucet, a bucket, and a small pan to pour the cold water (no hot water) on our heads and bodies to bath.

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Life is far more difficult here, yet the people on the Wings team are just the best! They help in every way, are dear friends already, and our journeys together is just beginning.

Thanks for your prayers. I feel them all day, every day. Pray for safe travel (Raymond's an amazing driver, but the other drivers can be crazy and the roads difficult.)

Tomorrow we go to the 2nd prison, visit orphanages on the way back, and go back to Monrovia. Please don't send text messages or leave a voice mail for me on my cell phone. It is very expensive to call me.

Thanks for reading about us on Facebook and hopefully our website. It's very difficult here to download all the photos from our phones, as it's hard to find Wi-Fi. But we will have tons of photos for you to view at some point.

Thanks for your prayers and I'll try to continue to send updates.
Blessings, Ann

Journal Entry – January 7, 2020 – Tuesday **Visit to Gbranga Prison & 45 Acre Prison Plantation**

Each day gets more exciting! We had our team of 8 Liberians and 4 Americans who went to the prison right away at 10:00 am this morning when it opened. The officials had called ahead, and they were expecting us. They were very welcoming, they opened the huge metal prison gates, and we drove onto the grounds.

Just like yesterday, they kept the male inmates in their cell units. They had 243 total inmates, and each "cell unit" had probably 20+ inmates in each cell. We went into one wing and shared why we were there, taught them our normal songs that I described in a previous email, and then did the Parable of the Sower out in the common hallway. Cells were on each side of the hall, so they watched us as Raymond was the Sower, various team members were seeds, thorns, birds, stompers, and a rock. Everyone, including even the Chaplain at the end, ended up being "seeds" that grew and grew 100-fold.

Everyone was laughing, having so much fun, and then we talked about the "good soil" that can even be found in prison. Moses, the Chaplains, obviously was doing a great job. They do daily Bible studies, had a picture of Jesus on the wall of the hallway and positive quotes and scriptures even written on the cell walls.

They all were so excited to hear about the Proclaimer (Bible on tape) from **Faith Comes by Hearing**, and the **Daily Guideposts** from **Guideposts Magazine**. We aren't allowed to take photos within the prison compound, unless it's with the staff. I sure wish we could, as you would see the most joyous, happy faces. I KNOW we have brought hope, joy, and love into the prisons!!!

Then we went to the larger conference room and they 6 female inmates were invited to join us there. The Superintendent told us that the ladies were more trustworthy, so they were brought into this nice room. They all walked in a looked so sad. Not a smile, and one lady made no eye

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contact with any of us. When I said we were going to teach them some songs, the Superintendent said maybe they could sing for us. Suddenly they got full of energy, started smiling, and sang a song in the local language and the message was, “Why is Adam hiding?” They came alive, and it was so much fun to see them happy.

Once we started teaching them songs and having them be seeds and part of the Parable of the Sower, they really got involved. They were like different people.

Raymond, the Chaplain, and I all said what I thought were closing comments, and then the Superintendent came in and said he'd like to say something too. Then, he was the first Warden in all the years that I've done Wings, said he would like to close us in prayer!!!! He said the prayer in front of the ladies, his staff, and all of us. He could have been one of the best pastors I've ever heard. He is a man of God, and obviously his calling is working in the prisons to help the inmates!!!

Then he told us about his “plantation” about a 20- minute drive from the prison. A local village had given the prison 45 acres of land. He asked if we wanted to see it. Of course, we wanted to go! He took the prison transport vehicle, probably holds about 12 passengers. It had bars on the outside, and he turned the siren on the whole drive to the plantation.

The roads were very rugged, all dirt, with many hills, potholes, and how Raymond has maneuvered over the “roads” has constantly amazed me. We finally had to stop and walk the remaining I'm guessing $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ miles to the plantation. Part of it was a good path, and the last little bit was literally “in the wild”. We saw dried palm branches “traps” to kill local animals like squirrels, possums, & bush hogs, and even deer that they will cook over the open fires.

We also saw the rubber trees up close. They score about 3 feet off the ground narrow strips of the barks – up to 2-feet wide that slant down. The white sap drips down into a cup at the base of the tree and every day someone comes by to collect the sap. Once the tree is stripped, the sap must be collected that day. They only cut into the tree every 2 days to give the tree time to produce more sap. Each holder to collect the sap was probably 8 – 10 oz. the surprising thing was that it was very white – not black.

We first encountered staff and probably some of the female inmates cooking over an open fire. They had 2 pots – one to cook rice and another huge 24# black round pot that cooked a bean dish to feed everyone. We heard the chanting and singing of the bush inmates out whacking with machetes at the ‘bush’. There were many vines, a grass that cuts easily (it cut my thumb and leg) and they cut down a large 12 x 12 ft. area in only minutes it seemed.

By the end of February, the Superintendent hopes to have all 45 acres cleared. He had done a similar project at another prison in a much smaller scale, so the top authorities moved him to his 4th prison to do this large project. He was such an amazing visionary, and the Liberian prison system is SO blessed to have him in charge of this project. The seeds we gave him will be planted closer to one of the community water pumps so they can water the crops, as where we were today would be too far from water and the crops wouldn't grow well. He hopes to grow food to not only feed the inmates at his prison, but others as well.

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A few inmates, and the Sup., used a machete to clear a new path in the bush so we could more quickly return to the main road. WOW – we saw the first “Prison Plantation” in Liberia and I sure hope to come back and see if filled with life-sustaining crops.

I’m afraid the Wi-Fi- will soon go out so I’ll send this out quickly. We had to wait to get into our rooms until 10:00 pm. The hourly rate is \$5 US/hour and after 10:00 pm – noon the next day it’s \$10 US for rooms with fans and \$20 US for rooms with AC. Most of us are in rooms with fans so that was a big savings, vs. \$20 per night had we gotten into our rooms before 10. Apparently, all guest houses have hourly rates.

It was another amazing day, and even more so because it’s my son Stuart’s birthday. I was able to send a text through to him that he got so that made my day even more special.

Good night and blessings,
Ann

Journal Entry – January 9, 2020 – Liberia – Thursday Buchanan Prison

It is SO wonderful traveling with the Liberian Team Members!!! I can’t say enough about them. They are helpful, participate in everything, and are soaking up our teachings in powerful ways. There is so much to say and so little time by the time we finally get to a room with Wi-Fi and or even electricity. But I’ll try to write up something about today.

I’m sitting on the edge of what I’d say may be the size of a queen-size bed. They only had 3 rooms here, so Mary and I are sharing. I’m so grateful for the fan blowing on me right now. Mary is “bathing” in the bathroom. We have a 33-gal. plastic container in the bathroom and a small pan with a handle. We will suds up, and then get water from the container and pour it on our heads. The water is not heated of course, yet where our Liberian Team members may stay (they don’t have a room yet) will be determined if they can even “bathe”. Americans have no idea how blessed we are.

We were trying to boil water in our electric pot, and our pot kept blowing the electricity for the whole guest house! So, Raymond had to go find bottled water for us before he could find a hotel room for the other Liberians! We can’t drink the water here, or even the plastic-bagged water that is slightly filtered that they drink. The water we are bathing from comes from a pump, and even the Liberians don’t drink that water. Water is SUCH an important thing and we sure take clean water from the tap for granted!

We left the hotel at 10:00. Along the way, which was a 3-hour drive without stops, we stopped by Raymond’s hometown, very near the airport. We were so blessed to stop and find his mother and uncle at home. I chuckled to myself because they lived directly across the street from the IRS office (Liberian counterpart), which was right there with everything else – houses – businesses, etc. One didn’t have far to go to pay taxes!

We also met one of his brothers. While driving along the highway a car came up behind us, then pulled up next to us, and it was Raymond’s brother! It is a small world!

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Next, we stopped at the Catholic Church and school compound which was very near the airport, and the main Firestone plantation – compound – and factory buildings. They have thousands of acres there I believe, right next to the airport and close to the ocean. Talk about prime property. The workers who plant the rubber trees which last for about 22 years and produce rubber in about 7 years, live in brick buildings that were built for them and their families. Apparently, it is very difficult to get a job at Firestone, as they get free brick housing and their children go to school (which is expensive for most Liberians). There was even a church high on a hill on the Firestone property.

The Catholic Church compound was lovely. We met briefly with the priest and will worship there on Sunday and then do some of our “typical Wings activities” with the students after worship. We encouraged the priest to tell all the kids to invite their friends to church on Sunday.

Then we drove to the prison. Again, we were greeted warmly by the staff. The prison had 97 prisoners. There were 8 pods of men and the bars in this prison were open from top to bottom so we could see clearly into their pods. The Superintendent asked the men to be quiet and they immediately stopped talking. They had just been served their dinner, which was in about a 10-inch flat bowl and it looked like rice with some other dish on top.

The men were very attentive from the beginning. We followed our normal procedures that I've described in previous prisons, but also taught them signing for the song “Jesus Loves Me”. They loved it! We next had the team dramatize the Bible story of Jesus sowing the seeds. We had a few new team members with us today, as Raymond wants as many people as possible to experience what we do. (They drive in a second car – 4 in the back seat and 3 in the front seat!) They are packed in, but never complain. For some reason I talked even more about that prison being “good soil for them” and how they could multiply the seeds we left hundred-fold and also plant “good seeds” at home as good fathers, brothers, and neighbors. They all were SO attentive and really seemed to understand the message.

Next, we met with the ladies. They only had 3 female inmates – one probably in her teens, another in 20's maybe, and another one in her 50's the Liberians guessed as she was the “Old Woman”. I laughed when they called her an “Old Woman” and told them I was 69 and they seemed quite surprised. Life in Liberia is very difficult, and most people die before age 62!

The Sup. Invited us to walk over to the tilled soil right next to the prison, and he said they would be planting our seeds in the soil there. They also have bananas and papayas across from the prison.

They are located on a gorgeous lake. It seemed strange to not see any houses on the banks of the lake, a boat, or any activity. We walked to the memorial for Mr. Buchanan, an American, who came in the 1800's and was a leader in their country. The site was overlooking the lake and it was so peaceful and lovely.

We had dinner tonight at a local restaurant in this huge port town. Tomorrow we will go see the harbor and port and visit the orphanage where the Liberian Team did a Christmas Party. Liberians eat rice with every meal. Often, we have tasty fish, children, or beef dishes to put on top. Most of the dishes are mildly spicy and as a New Mexican, I love them. (The other team

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members do too!) They are served in plates similar to the plates I saw the inmates using. Sometimes two people share a bowl, and Mary and I, and Kristen and Brian, usually only order a single bowl for the two of us, as there is so much rice. Whatever we don't eat, the team eagerly devours! It's so much fun to see them enjoying the food.

There is a Liberian soccer team staying here and they are playing music and dancing in the parking lot outside our room. I hope I can sleep, as it is very hot, even with the fan. Each day brings new delights, new friends, and new experiences. I wish I had a huge team here so many more could be experiencing this rich, warm, extraordinary experience. Blessings and love, Ann

Journal Entry – January 10, 2020 – Friday - Life in Liberian Prisons & A School & Orphanage

I'm sitting on a small table, like a coffee table, writing this entry. The power went off at 5:45 am. and it got very hot in Mary's and my room and then the community came alive with all the talking, music, etc. so that was the end of sleep. Actually, it got very hot, so I decided to move outside. I was sitting on the bench, and one of the soccer players who was also staying here was very kind and got a chair for me to sit down. It's a good 20 degrees cooler outside than in the rooms.

One of the soccer team members is washing their clothes on a washboard and pail, and all their shirts are hanging off the razor wire to cool above the wall surrounding our guest quarters. Most of the guest houses have large solid metal gates where the car gets parked inside overnight. I assume that is to protect the car.

Life in a prison is VERY difficult for inmates here. I can't wait to tell the inmates in the U.S. how easy they have it.

All inmates are confined in a small pod, all concrete, usually with a half wall in the back where we assume the toilet area is and probably where they try to wash up. I can only imagine how hot the pods must get, as we were dripping wet and we were out in the hallway that had a little air flow from the doors at each end of the hall.

It seems they each have their own water container outside their pods. Then it looks like each inmate has their own water bottle. Some are small 12 oz., and some are liter size. They wash their clothes in the pod and hang their clothing around the area. One prison had one mattress kind of strung across the room about 5 feet off the ground. I don't know how they sleep there, and I would not like to be underneath it in case whatever was holding it up broke.

Some pods had 37 men in them, and it looked like they barely had room to cross their legs. It seemed quite dark in the hallways and pods, and apparently that was after they had turned on the lights. I can't imagine how dark those prisons must be at night.

All the Superintendents told us they really didn't have enough food to feed the men. We hope and pray that the seeds we left them will be planted and help supplement the inmate's diets.

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In one prison the men were weaving and tying string around the bottles in beautiful designs. A person could request that their name be woven into the pattern even. I bought one bottle and two pens with the decorative designs. They are gorgeous.

If the inmates behave in the one prison, they are invited to go into the bush to clear the land. It seemed like most of the other prisons kept the inmates inside their pods most of the time. Each facility did have an open area where they said they allow up to 7 inmates to go outside and exercise at a time. We only saw two men with handcuffs and tied to a pole.

The women apparently usually behave much better than the men so are given more privileges. That was true in all 3 prisons we visited.

We left the guest house about 10:00 AM to go to a school where the Wings' team had already led a family day. I wasn't feeling quite right, so ended up heading off to the bathroom 4 times. It was wonderful to see the team filling in for me. (After doing the same thing for so many days, they really are learning and it's exciting to watch them. They already have been doing a great job here. Now that they are getting a little more training, I can't wait to see what they will do! (Thank heaven the 4 trips to the bathroom ended any problems I was having and I'm back to normal now.)

Next, we went to an orphanage where the Wings' team had done a Christmas Party. They were expecting us and all 50+ children (all ages) were sitting on benches out in the shade, already singing for us. It was beautiful! One girl and one boy even lead singing and told a brief story. Talk about being brave little boys and girls.

The staff had a various member speak to us, and then we started our program. We taught the children and staff our usual songs, and then took them to a grassy area to play with tarps and balls. They bounced the ball 10 times on their tarp without it dropping to the ground, and they had such a good time. We did a variety of games like that and then did the story of Jesus calming the storm and saying, "Be Still!" They seemed to love that too.

There are needs everywhere we go so I've tried to instill in Raymond and the team that we teach HOW to fish, NOT give the fish. Millions of dollars wouldn't be enough to take care of just the needs we've seen but planting the seeds we brought along are estimated to feed at least 7,000 people with the first planting. We encourage them to harvest and dry the seeds for future plantings.

We wanted to see the Port of Buchanan, and Buchanan is the capital city of Grand Bassa, a large city port south of Monrovia. We drove out to it and there were several officers on duty guarding the port. They allowed us to get out and look, but we couldn't drive out on the loading areas for security purposes. Two large ships were docked out quite a way, and smaller boats bring the palm oil and wood to the ships. Liberia only exports from that port. I was surprised that no rubber was shipped from that port. We have pictures to show once we can download them to give you an idea of what it looked like. I grew up in Michigan with huge iron ore docks and I was surprised not to see something similar.

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We ate lunch at the same place we had dinner. They serve a delicious pepper soup (usually made with fish and the soup is spicy) and then we pour it over rice.

We started the 3-hour drive back to Monrovia and ran out of gas close to the airport, which is about an hour from Monrovia. Our amazing Wings team, in the second car following us, stopped for gas, and brought the gas to us. But it was amazing how they did it! They bought 2 of the large gallon pickle-size jars of gas, poured it into heavy black plastic bags, then took one of our old liter water bottles, and poured the gas from the plastic bags into the car! They are SO resourceful.

The plugs on our car were acting up, so we were so happy when we finally got to Monrovia and back to our hotel where we have been staying. We had come “home”.

We ate at the restaurant/night club attached to our guest house and had an absolutely delicious BBQ chicken dinner of plantain, French fries, and cucumber salad. We each split a plate and our cost for ¼ of the chicken was only \$2.50 each. Had we known how good it was going to be, we may have ordered more. Generally, we’ve been sharing a meal between two of us because the servings of rice are so big.

Kristen is boiling the water tonight. It is quite an ordeal as all our water needs to be boiled. It can take a long time, so I’m thankful she is boiling tonight so I can write this email.

When I get Wi-Fi, I’ll send this out. It has been hard to get it to work. We are SO spoiled with all our technology, yet everyone here has a cell phone and flat screen TVs are everywhere. The world certainly is changing.

Blessings to all,
Ann

Liberian Update – January 1, 2020 – Resort near Airport Libassa Eco Lodge

After we left Monkey Island, Raymond drove us to the Libassa Eco Lodge. It was a very fancy lodge, where rooms go from \$125/night, \$250/night and \$500/night. What was really special about this lodge is how they tried to be so ecofriendly. The individual lodges were round and built off the ground about 3-4 ft. They didn’t have AC, but each unit had ceiling fans. The reason for no AC was to keep the noise natural to the environment.

There were sandy paths which took you to each guest house, lagoon, and pool and restaurant/bar area. They had a single light bulb under a 10” cover which provided ground lighting but didn’t disturb the natural wilderness.

The 4 pools were incredible. They had a “lazy river”, two water slides, a hot tub which fed into one of the pools, and the pools were beautiful laid out to fit the natural setting.

The bar and restaurant area were elevated and there was an outdoor patio surround the entire restaurant/bar, overlooking and at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean. It was spectacular.

One of the guests started talking to us, and come to find out she was from Washington, DC and was a hair stylist. She was from Liberia, and her fiancé is still living in Liberia, and she has been trying for a long time to get a visa for him. She comes and does humanitarian aid. Her name is

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CeCe or Cecelia, and I hope she gets back to me once we return to the states. She is a good contact for Raymond because of her Liberian connections.

Next our guide (and I see why they needed us to have a guide) because we walked through the natural bush to get to a beautiful lagoon, that also had a swimming area, water sports, bar and restaurant.

The team would have loved to have had at least one night there. Our accommodations are not quite so fancy. We returned to Teta's Guest House last night with no water at all! The poor desk clerk had to go and get about 20 gallon "trash cans" for each of our rooms so we could pour the water on our heads to shower and do our laundry. We aren't exactly staying at a first-class resort.

Liberian Updates – January 11, 2020 - A Picture of Life in Liberia

We have just arrived at the Wings For LIFE International Liberian office. We have problems with the car we've been renting (a friend of Raymond's because otherwise a rental car would probably triple the cost), so he is trying to find another car for us.

As a team, we will try to describe the beautiful countryside we have been driving through the past several days.

We see everything from really beautiful homes in the distance, to rural villages with homes made of adobe. We pass "adobe shops" – open areas where they are making adobe, which looks similar to adobe in New Mexico. Most of the adobe homes have metal corrugated sheets, but occasionally in the very rural areas we have seen thatched roofs.

What was especially lovely were the special decorations they had made on their adobe homes! They had handprints, different designs, and all the walls of each home were beautifully decorated. We have only seen that in Gbarnga in the countryside of Bong County.

Water pumps are frequent in each community. I "thought" I wasn't seeing people carrying much water, but apparently many of the containers that we see on people's heads, contain water and other supplies. One young girl was carrying a large bundle of wood on her head. Often people carry palm seeds on large flat pans that look like pizza plates, and they have an assortment of various things that they sell on the "pizza pans" as well.

The streets are filled with people walking, vendors selling so many colorful assorted things including second-hand clothing that we assume some may be shipped from the U.S., plastic chairs, brooms, plastic buckets of all sizes, and thousands of other necessary items.

The coffin, furniture, wrought iron, and other "factories" are located right on the edge of the streets. They have interesting over-stuffed large-size sofas and matching chairs, that also are built and sold right on the street. Piles of mattresses, which appear to be larger (guessing queen-size) are also stacked in the shops on the streets. There are city "markets" where we see all the small booths, but we haven't been into one yet.

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The transportation in Liberia is not by buses generally, in fact we have only seen one 20-passenger “bus” but the sign on the bus indicated it was for employees of the humanitarian effort only. So, most Liberians either have their own cars (very rare) or can rent a car like we have done. The majority of Liberians travel by motorcycles, which they call pen-pen, or tricycle “golf cart” type motorize vehicle called ke-ke. The pen-pens can carry up to 2 people but often-times we see a mother carrying an additional child. The ke-kes can carry 3 people, but often carry 4. The average cost of a pen-pen for about a 1-mile distance is about 250 LD per/person which is about 25 cents U.S. and it is faster. The motorcycles can go on the highway, as they can travel faster than the ke-ke.

The ke-kes stay in a local area, because they can’t go as fast as the motorcycles. The average cost of a ke-ke is 50 LD which is about 5 cents U.S. per-person. Ke-kes are used if you want to go to the market or want to be able to get through the heavy traffic because they are smaller.

The traffic is crazy, but honestly much better than India. Here we only see people, cars, motorcycles or ke-kes. But still, the traffic is extremely heavy, and Raymond is an extraordinary driver who maneuvers through the traffic, the speed bumps, the deeply rutted dirt roads which we are usually on to go to the orphanages, clinics, and even some of the prisons.

Because we have traveled on main highways which connect to other surrounding countries, there are frequent road stops with police, immigration officers and DEA agents looking for smuggling, drugs, illegal immigrants coming from different countries. Liberia is a desirable location for other African countries because it is the only African country that uses U.S. currency, it has more freedoms than other surrounding countries, it has many U.S. companies like Firestone that have brought in education, housing and healthcare for employees. An organization called U.S. Aid also does a lot for Liberia so other Africans find Liberia a place they want to live.

I will describe Raymond’s living situation to give you an idea of how he lives. He lives in what we would consider a “small compound”, which is also the Wings office. There is a brick wall around the whole property with glass shards and razor wire on top for security. There are 16 people who live here, including his mother-in-law, his family including wife Satta, children Kaleb (3), Blessing (8), and then the in-laws including 4 adults and 6 children named Abraham (9) and Princess (13) who lost both parents in the Ebola crisis, Yayah (15), Bendu (16), Success (5), Josh (7), Praise (10), and baby Desire (1 year).

On the compound there are 4 dogs, about 10 chickens, 3 roosters and the dogs eat the food scraps and bark to provide security. They have 4 bathrooms (3 in the house) and 1 outside bathroom. They have one kitchen, but primarily cook outside on “coal” fire, which is made of palm branches, but they call it coal. They have a well inside the compound, but can’t drink the water, but can cook with the water as the water gets boiled in the cooking.

They wash their clothes on a washboard and a large plastic basin, which we’ve seen all over Liberia. They have a clothesline, which we’ve seen a few homes use. Otherwise clothes are dried on walls or on the ground.

He has a small garden here where they plant sweet potatoes. They eat the greens from the sweet potato, and we had that for one of the meals when we first got here. He also has palm

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trees which will produce nuts and palm oil and cassava, where they eat the root and the leaves. The leaves are ground and used for soups. The root is peeled, pounded by hand, and then boiled into “dumboy” which looked like a ball of dough before it rises. They also have banana, papaya, plantain, mango and sugar cane. Soon we hope the seeds we left will also be planted for the large family.

Liberian Update – January 11, 2020 Monkey Island

Yesterday Raymond spent a lot of time trying to find a vehicle for us to use. We were at his home/office, as were other team members. So, we spent some time training and demonstrating how we do various bible stories, we sang new songs, and they shared songs that they know and like to sing too. It is apparent Americans have been here in previous years as they know songs like “Mary had a little lamb”, Amazing Grace, You’ve Got the Whole World, and You’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy Down in Your Heart”.

About 2:30 Raymond found a car for us to use so we drove out to Monkey Island, which was fairly close to the airport which is about an hour away. We first were stopped by a security officer, because the boats to take people to Monkey Island were past the Liberian Maritime training site which needed security. Raymond and the officer exchanged some heated words, but we tried to calm the situation down and were allowed to continue.

The small village where all the boats were located was again very congested and apparently considered a slum. It looked very poor. Trash was everywhere and mangy looking dogs were sorting through the trash and lizards were everywhere.

I would estimate there were 15 – 20 boats in the lagoon. They were like hand-made boats, about 30 feet long, and some of them had crosses on the bow of the ship. Each boat was named, and we got the first boat that was there. There were three benches on the boat, and we had to climb on their rock weights to get into the boats.

The motor was attached somehow to the boat and the boards around where the motor went into the ocean were cut away. I’ve never seen anything quite like that. We three women started on a bench, while Raymond and Brian were on the bow, and then later Brian sat on fish netting. Under the small area that was covered, Brian saw a straw mat for sleeping and there was also a blue tarp to protect the sleeping area.

We road on the boat out to the island and passed beautiful beaches with palm covered shaded areas that looked like big umbrellas. It was very picturesque. There were two speedboats, similar to what we’d see on a lake, with white-skinned passengers. We were told they were Lebanese.

They even had plastic chairs in the water near the beach. We arrived at the Monkey Island, but also found out monkeys are on 22 islands around that area. There was a small sandy beach and even though the Captain of the boat made chimpanzee sounds, they didn’t show. Then one of the 4 crew members went down to his red underwear, and much to the surprise of his other crew members, dove into the water, and swam to about 10-15 feet from the shore. He started making chimpanzee noises and splashing his arms up and down quickly, making a lot of noise.

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First, one chimpanzee showed up, then another, and another. Soon there were at least 6 that we could easily see, and we're guessing more. The Captain said there was one male and 16 females on that island. We laughed as one chimp stretched out on the white sandy beach and started doing what looked like yoga exercises.

Twice a day at 11 and 2 food and fresh water is brought in for the chimpanzees. No tourists are allowed in the area during feeding times. We were told that if you signed a waiver, you could go with local guides onto the island, but you were going there at your own risk. There is a YouTube video that can be found which shows exactly what process they use.

Come to find out the crew member who dove into the water to try to attract the chimps cut his little toe when he dove in. There were black rocks on the beaches and rivers we saw, so I'm guessing that perhaps he dove into a rocky area and cut his toe on the rocks. No wonder the other crew members were concerned. We were grateful he was OK, but also grateful he had attracted the chimps for us to see.

We came back on the boat and it was really funny when one of the crew members told Mary to get on his back and he carried her from the boat to the shore.

We felt really blessed to be able to go to this special island and see these special chimps.

Medical Supplies & Medicines – January 13, 2020

It is wonderful to have qualified medical staff as team members. Kristen is a registered nurse and Brian is a licensed medical assistant. We went to one of the main wholesale drug companies in downtown Monrovia. Kristen and Brian made up a list of supplies we wanted to buy.

There was long counter with medicines on the shelves behind and there were probably at least 6 sales staff. It took about an hour to purchase \$150 worth of drugs and medical supplies. We bought the following:

1. Tylenol
2. Malaria drugs
3. Nerve pain vitamins
4. Some antibiotics
5. Antifungal crème
6. Cough syrup
7. Anti-arthritis medicine (pain medication)
8. Anti-diabetic medicine (metformin)
9. 2 blood pressure kits

Since we had spent so much time buying the supplies and talking to the staff, to our total surprise, the manager of the store told us he had medicines that would be expiring and he wanted to give them to us!!! What a gift that was!

The medicines given to us included:

1. Birth control pills
2. Cholesterol medicine

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3. Allergy medicines
4. Hormone replacement medicines

Each box was at least 16” wide x 24” long x 24” high. I can’t imagine what the cost of all this medicine would have been! He knew that we were going to give the medicine away to clinics, and I believe he was thankful to find honest people who wouldn’t take it and sell the drugs.

NOTE: 1-15-20

We walked over to the St. Francis Assisi Medical Center today to deliver many of the medicines. Some of the medicines that were donated are being saved to give to the prisons. It is SO wonderful to meet people who are so generous and willing to help us.

Monrovia Central Prison – January 14, 2020 – written Kristen Johnson

Today’s visit to Monrovia Central Prison was quite an experience. This prison is commonly known as “South Beach” and is the largest prison in Liberia. 1360 inmates occupy South Beach and it is common to have at least 17 inmates per cell with 318 sharing one toilet! When we walked into the prison, we encountered men wearing orange pants. This uniform represented men that had been able to achieve status, allowing them to work and roam freely within the prison compound.

All other prisoners were in their normal clothes. One of the prison blocks appeared to be a three-story building and we saw long ropes with makeshift bags attached to the end of the rope. Men from the yard would place items in the bag and the other men from the third-floor cells would be pulling the items up to their cell. We were told by fellow inmates that these items might consist of water, money, food, etc. This prison did have a canteen on site, and we witnessed prisoners purchasing items from the canteen.

Upon our arrival we had been greeted by the prison chaplain as well as the assistant superintendent and the superintendent. The chaplain took us to his office for us to wait for the chapel to be available. While in the chaplain’s office we met two lovely inmates that were the chaplain’s helpers. They were eager to share with us information about the prison from a “prisoner’s perspective”. Unfortunately, some of what they shared is a common problem at each prison that we visited. There just simply are not enough resources for all the prisoners. They are provided one meal per day consisting only of rice. Due to the obvious overcrowding, hygiene is an issue. While a spouse may be allowed to visit an inmate throughout the year, children are only allowed to visit three times per year. These dates are Christmas day, Independence Day and New Year’s Day. One of the men’s names was Revival and it was a very appropriate name for him. We could tell from his conversation that he was a well-educated, Godly man. Following our impromptu practice of the Parable of the Lost Son, Revival taught us a beautiful song that went with the parable, it was entitled “My Father”.

When the chapel was available, we were escorted to it. It was a fairly large structure with 30 men anxiously awaiting our arrival. We were all introduced and then began our Wings program. One man had a drum and was eager to play along as we sang the songs. Each man smiled, laughed and eagerly participated in the worship as well as during the re-enactment of the parable. Following the parable, our new friend Revival lead us all in a few rounds of “My Father”. It was glorious!

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While we were not allowed into all of the different units on this visit, the officials did allow us into one cell block. The men were allowed to come out of their cells and stand in the large hallway while separated from us by a rope. We think around 50 men were in the hall eager to see what we were up to. Ann was given a much-needed megaphone! We taught these men the words and motions to “Jesus loves me”. WOW! It was quite something to see these “big tough guys” sing along to the song.

After singing, we did our best to re-enact the Parable of the Sower at the end of the long hall. Even though I am sure it was difficult for all to see, the men seemed to love it.

We waved our goodbyes and were escorted to the superintendent’s office where we wrapped up our visit by presenting our gifts. As with the other facilities, the gift that seemed to be the most revered were the seeds! Hopefully the seeds will provide much needed nutrition to the inmates and staff. This was the first facility that we were able to leave medication. The superintendent stated that he would have the prison clinic come collect it.

All of the officials seemed quite pleased with our visit, but most especially the chaplain. He loved the Wings teaching through drama and indicated that he too was going to start utilizing such teaching methods!

We wrapped up the visit with pictures outside of the main gates.

Liberian Update – Monrovia Central Prison, United Methodist Church Liberia & Shopping – January 15, 2020

Yesterday we headed into town to do some “early morning” shopping – 10:00 am, and to visit the United Methodist Liberian Church Office. The Bishop wasn’t it, but the Assistant to the Bishop, as well as the woman in charge of all the clinics for the Methodists and their 700+ congregations, graciously welcomed us in. They were interested in finding out what Wings was all about. We got their contact information and look forward to a new relationship with them and our Liberian team.

Next, we stopped at a dress shop. Kristen found a beautiful red dress with matching head scarf. The shop owner put the scarf on her head African style, but doesn’t quite look African, but certainly looks beautiful!

We stopped at a street market and main shopping area in downtown Monrovia. We all bought some jewelry; Brian found a Dolce & Gabbana purse for his fiancé. (I didn’t even know the brand.) But he was very happy to find it and knows she will love it.

After the prison visit (see separate email) we continued our shopping. There was a short block in downtown Monrovia that had all African art items. We bought wood carvings, gourd musical instruments, drums, necklaces, bracelets, Kristen a Nativity Set, and I bought some items to auction off at our next fundraiser.

Because we always were in a Wings shirt, and the Liberians were too, we certainly stood out. We built relationships everywhere we went. We even met the carvers and artists who when they

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found out about Wings, told us they would give us their very best prices because we were there to help the Liberian people.

8:00 pm – Monrovia Airport – January 15, 2020

I've been in tears – tears of joy and sorrow at leaving our dear friends in Liberia. There were 18 people who came out to the airport to say goodbye. We had quite the experience today. Mary and I couldn't check into the Brussels flight and thought that was strange. So, Raymond thought we'd better go to the Brussels Airline office near downtown Monrovia. It was about 2:30 when we got to the office. They tried and tried to help us, but finally determined it was a United problem. Raymond bought money for his phone to call United, but the time he bought kept running out. At one point they said we could buy one-way tickets for over \$800 each!!!! I was nervous, as we were in the middle of Monrovia, had rush hour traffic to deal with, had a 26-mile drive to the airport (at least an hour's drive), and we didn't even have tickets!

Finally, around 5:00pm we got through to United, they told us they had made a mistake and had cancelled our flight, and then they rebooked us! The three agents at the office were fantastic. They all tried everything they could do, and I will definitely write a letter to Brussels Airlines to commend them. Their names are Kallay Tidankey, Richann Gboyah, and Ama Harris. When we got to the airport, there was Kallay, the Manager! They sent us to her lane so she could check us in, and she couldn't have been nicer.

Since we were so late leaving the airline office, we had Raymond call his house where everyone was gathered for a huge feast. They had actually fixed an identical meal to what we had taken them out to at Teta's Bar & Grill. They had grilled chicken, French fries, plantain, pineapple, watermelon, cucumber slices, and a cabbage salad with dressing. Kristen showed me the platters of food that had been so beautifully prepared by the Liberian team. WOW – WHAT SPECIAL PEOPLE!!!!

In our car we were getting hungry because we hadn't eaten since breakfast. It was hilarious. I started digging in my computer bag and first found some beef jerky. They had never had it and loved it. Next, I found two granola bars, so we shared that. We kept laughing about eating the "crumbs" and left-overs out of my bag and turning it all into "loaves and fishes".

Because Mary, Raymond, Lee and I had missed the feast, they packed up plates of food for each of us to eat at the airport. It was unbelievable!!!!

Kristen and Brian also had quite the adventure. Since we couldn't come back with the car, decisions had to be made about who could come to the airport. They unfortunately had to leave 3 people back at the house, but the other 15 people piled into the truck. There were 3 in the front, 4 in the back seat, which left 8 people in the back of the truck along with all of our luggage! (At least 8 checked bags and our carry-ons too.)

The doctor's wife Musu, from the St. Francis Assisi Clinic, saw the truck and somehow, she got involved in transporting three of the team members to the airport. Along the way they stopped near Rancy's house and another 4 got out of the back of the truck to ride with him.

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As we pulled up to the terminal, we saw the Wings team in their shirts hauling all the bags from the parking area to the terminal. I have never been so happy to see team members!!!

We all stood in line outside to start the baggage check-in, and the doctor's wife presented each of us girls with a beautiful dress and Brian a lovely shirt. We couldn't believe it!!!! Here she drove all the way to the airport to give us the lovely gifts.

We checked in, and then the agents were kind enough to let us out two at a time to say our good-byes. Mary and I walked to the parking lot and had our feast on the back of Raymond's car. They all are SO thoughtful and kind! It's hard to put into words.

We gathered together back in front of the terminal, I said a few words of thanks, and then we did a group hug and I said a prayer. I cried through the whole thing. They are VERY dear, VERY special people. We are all truly the most blessed people, getting to know such amazing human being!

We cleared immigration and security easily. When we got to the gate area several of the agents asked about our shirts, and when we told them about Wings, they wanted to get involved. It's amazing how everyone wants to help their country, their children, and when they hear how much fun it is, want to be a part of it. It truly has been a remarkable trip!