



# Joseph Jones is 32 years old

**When he was a small boy, a benign tumor began growing on his neck. Over the years, a small lump grew into an oscar-worthy special effect, and played lead villain for the better part of his life. When he turned 20 near the start of Liberia's civil war, it took a temporary back seat as rebel soldiers stormed into his sleepy village killing his parents and friends. Joseph narrowly escaped into the dense rainforest where he waited out the attack. Returning home to the stench of death and tragedy, he wept freely. For many reasons.**

When Joseph speaks, he begins with a shudder as his facial muscles tense, his eyes squint and his lips tremble. After a moment, sound emerges - halted and pushed. I first spoke to him outside the ship's gangway a few weeks ago. We sat on a wooden bench together and talked, only 2 years separating us

in age, only a few inches in height. Yet I was born in one of the world's richest nations, he in a war-torn country with no electricity or running water - where one doctor serves 50,000 people. Our worlds met as the vast ocean between New York and Liberia delivered a fully-equipped hospital ship and western surgeons to his country's port. It's often hard for me to explain to friends and family back in Manhattan just how poor Liberians are. About six hours from the broken-down capital, Monrovia, Joseph lives in a village called Korkordavidtown. He sells palm

oil for a living. This consists of about seven days work collecting the palm, then two or three days work turning it into oil. After ten days, he can produce about five gallons of oil. This he sells for \$4. So Joseph makes about 40 cents a day, or \$144 a year. He uses the money to buy soap, clothes and food. Joseph said his tumor made people afraid of him. Or, if they weren't afraid, they just laughed at him. He knew for years the only place he could get help was a hospital, but even his wildest dreams didn't allow money for an operation.

"I prayed that God would bring the hospital to me. Every night."

"I will be feeling happy.  
I will tell them all God  
has answered my prayer."



So Joseph prayed. For about 20 years.  
Now I'm a New Yorker, and about as cynical as  
they come. More cynical, actually.  
The conversation went like this.  
"Cmon Joseph. What do you mean you prayed??  
How did you pray??? What did you pray?????"  
"I prayed that God would bring the hospital to  
me. Every night."

RIGHT.  
And he told everyone in his village that it would  
happen. He told them he was certain one day,  
he would somehow reach a hospital and have  
the work done. So last year, when Joseph heard  
on the radio that a hospital ship was coming  
for the first time to Liberia full of surgeons who  
gave free operations, he wasn't surprised. Nor  
was he surprised that the ship specialized in the  
removal of benign tumors.

Right.  
I can only marvel at that kind of faith. At that  
kind of endurance. It seems far removed from  
the reality I have allowed myself. Could I suffer  
for even 5 years with an enormous tumor?  
Absorb scorn and hatred for something that  
wasn't my fault? Would I pray for deliverance to  
an unseen God for 20 years?

And continue to believe?  
Each miracle I see here brings me a little closer.  
Volunteering with Mercy Ships for 13 months  
now, I've taken over 60,000 photographs.  
I've seen thousands of people with unthinkable  
defomities, desperate to see our doctors,  
clinging to a small hope for salvation. I know  
what poverty really looks like. I also know what  
can be done about it. I've photographed more  
than 20 operations on the ship, and seen the  
lives of the poor transformed through the

sacrifices of real life Good Samaritans  
and through the funding that allows  
their work.

But more importantly, as I photograph  
almost every patient we treat, I've  
had the honor of learning from these  
truly remarkable people. Joseph just  
added his name to a lengthening list  
of heroes that clung to hope and faith,  
refusing to give up the fight for life  
and survival. I have so much to learn  
from them.

Joseph went home on Wednesday.  
The 550 gram tumor joined the ship's  
medical waste, and he seemed at  
ease. We were able to help him with a  
little money for a dowry so he could  
marry his fiancée. And although the  
operation didn't fix his broken speech,  
he struggled and grinned as he  
planned what he'd say to all those who  
had doubted him.

"I will be feeling happy. I will tell them  
all God has answered my prayer."

**Story and images by Scott Harrison.**  
**More patients at [www.onamercyship.com](http://www.onamercyship.com)**



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name to a lengthening  
list of heroes that clung  
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