



Dear family, friends & supporters,

Welcome to the much promised, long overdue first blog of our Mercy Ships adventure!

The past couple of months have gone by in a blur of preparations as we packed up our essentials (and you wouldn't believe how much stuff is essential when you're going for a year), prepared the house for tenants, moth-balled the Santé et Beauté clinic and generally put all aspects of our life in Wiltshire on pause for a year. In the final days of our preparations we were rocked by the tragic news that Elizma's brother, Johan, had passed away suddenly back home in Cape Town. As such, when we did finally hit the road at the beginning of July we headed in different directions as Elizma returned to South Africa whilst Ian and the children spent some time in Cornwall saying farewell to family prior to reuniting at Heathrow for the flight to Texas.



After the frantic pace of the preceding months, we allowed ourselves a few days of rest and relaxation in Dallas to recover from the jet lag & acclimatise to landing in the middle of a Texan summer. A trip to the Stockyards in Fort Worth, a historic cattle ranching district, gave Piran the chance to try his hand at riding a pony whilst Abigail braved her first rodeo – quite literally.



Then it was on to the Mercy Ships International Support Centre. The ISC is situated on a large campus one hundred miles east of Dallas in the beautiful, rolling countryside of East Texas. It houses the various administrative departments that support the ships – marine & technical operations, finance, HR and medical operations to name but a few – plus a pretty impressive PR operation & the chaplaincy team. It also has residential accommodation spread across a pine covered campus.



Here, the charity runs a two week “Onboarding” programme for long term crew before they head to the ships. The days are full with a mix of worship (Bible Belt style!), Christian study and sessions dedicated to the practicalities of life onboard ship (the vast majority of the participants are not seafarers by trade and are new to shipboard life). The children have their own Kids Onboarding programme which both Abigail and Piran are thoroughly enjoying – particularly the afternoons which seem to be largely spent cooling off in the swimming pool. We’ve also been observing with interest the local wildlife, which, like most things in Texas, seems to be significantly bigger and wilder than we are used to (we found this spider casually spinning a web on the porch – it’s at least 6 inches across)...

Next weekend we will wrap up things here in Texas and head to Tenerife, a 36 hour journey across 6 time zones, where we will finally see & board the *Global Mercy* – our home for the next year!

We’ll update you once we are there, but in the meantime thank you again for your love, support & prayers.

Ian, Elizma, Abigail & Piran