
Healing Voyage




*Since 1978, the global charity Mercy Ships has served as a floating hospital, bringing medical care to developing nations around the world. Having volunteered twice with the organization, Kirsten Murphy, '12, reflects on her life-changing journeys.*

By Natalie Missakian

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HE 11-YEAR-OLD GIRL ARRIVED WITH A large tumor covering the front of her scalp and drooping over her right eye — and like many new patients on board the Africa Mercy, she was withdrawn and nonverbal.

Volunteer nurse Kirsten Murphy, '12, was responsible for changing her dressing after surgeons removed the mass. But while Murphy tried to make a connection, the girl, Angeline, never spoke, not even through translators.

"She hung her head and rarely made eye contact . . . avoided everyone's gaze, even after surgery," says Murphy. Determined to reach the young patient, she tried to put herself in the girl's shoes.

"It hit me — what she must have gone through as a child, the pointing and the bullying," says Murphy. So she decided to greet the girl with a daily affirmation: "Jesus loves you, Jesus thinks you're beautiful, and I think you're beautiful too."

Day after day, Murphy repeated those words to no response. Until one day, "she gave me this little grin," Murphy says.



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## NURSING PROGRAM TOPS

Southern's nursing program is ranked among the top 10 percent in the country, according to NursingSchoolsAlmanac.com, a prominent online resource for prospective nursing students. The site lauded Southern for its 90-percent pass rate on the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX), the test a nurse must pass to attain a license.

The guide also notes that since 2010, students in the university's Accelerated Career Entry (ACE) program earned a pass rate of between 93 and 100 percent. ACE is geared toward students who are interested in making a career change into the nursing field. Most recently, the first-time pass rate of Southern's ACE graduates was 100 percent. And there's more good news: The Nursing Department celebrated a 100 percent first time pass rate on the Family Nurse Practitioner credentialing examination. More at: SouthernCT.edu/nursing.

Volunteer nurse Kirsten Murphy, '12, cares for Tafitasoa on the Africa Mercy in Madagascar. • The world's largest private hospital ship, the Africa Mercy has five state-of-the-art operating rooms and ward bed space for 80 patients. • Murphy (top row) and two other volunteers visit with a young orthopedic patient on deck.

"When I finally saw pictures of her looking straight into the camera with a smile on her face, it brought me to tears."

For Murphy, patients like Angeline are the ultimate inspiration, prompting her to return to Africa in fall 2016 for a second trip with Mercy Ships, a faith-based organization that brings health care to the world's poorest nations.

More than 1,600 volunteer with the group annually — with about 400 of those aboard the Africa Mercy at any given time. In March 2016, Murphy, a registered nurse from Bristol, Conn., finished her first seven-month assignment on the ship, helping provide critically needed medical care for patients unable to pay for treatment. Her responsibilities included working with plastic surgeons to repair life-altering facial tumors and burns. She also assisted in the obstetrics unit, treating women with severe childbirth-related injuries.



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Murphy discovered Mercy Ships while researching college options in high school and credits Southern's rigorous nursing program with making her dream of volunteering with the organization a reality. After earning a bachelor's degree in nursing at Southern, she spent three years working in hospitals in New Britain and Hartford before applying to the organization in early 2015. By August, she was on a plane headed for Tamatave, Madagascar.

"It's not only medical professionals. It's basically a small city," she says of the 16,572-ton ship, which housed 400 volunteers from 40 countries. Living conditions are comfortable, she says, with air conditioning, Wi-Fi, and even a Starbucks on board.

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## OUTREACH TO ARMENIA

Touring a state-of-the-art hospital in rural Armenia, Cheryl Resha, associate professor of nursing, was struck by the guide's frustration. "He was showing us a wonderful facility with state-of-the-art equipment," says Resha. "'But we still have a limited health care system,' he told us."

Such challenges are the driving force behind Southern's exploratory outreach efforts in Armenia, a former Soviet Republic bordering Georgia, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkey. Since declaring independence on Sept. 21, 1991, Armenia has confronted numerous obstacles in its quest to strengthen public infrastructures — including the lasting effects of a massive earthquake in 1988 that killed 25,000 people and left 500,000 homeless.

Aided by a grant from the Richard Davoud Donchian Foundation, a delegation of Southern faculty and staff traveled to the country in 2015. Their goal: to explore ways to help Armenia enhance its health care system.

The trip was successful. In addition to delivering the keynote address at the country's fourth International Medical Conference, Mary A. Papazian, former university president, met with key leaders, including Armenian President Serzh A. Sargsyan. There were grassroots gains as well. About 200 Armenian nurses attended a presentation by Resha and Southern colleague Antoinette Towle, assistant professor of nursing. The two returned to the country in 2016 along with other international stakeholders for the release of a study on the status of nursing in Armenia, conducted by the University of Pennsylvania and the American University of Armenia.

Today, Southern is exploring future collaborations. "It's a focus that we would like to pursue," says Sandra Bulmer, dean of the School of Health and Human Services, noting that a preliminary meeting was held with the Children of Armenia Fund. The nonprofit organization is committed to reducing rural poverty through education, healthcare, and community and economic development.

Ties also have been strengthened with the American University of Armenia, where faculty from Southern's School of Health and Human Services have been invited to teach intensive, three-week courses. "It's an exceptional faculty development opportunity and has furthered scholarship — and the students at American University of Armenia benefit by sharing the classroom with our outstanding professors," says Bulmer.

Among them is Joan Kreiger, coordinator of Southern's Respiratory Care Program. In March 2016, she traveled to Armenia to teach a course on health care management with Cynthia O'Sullivan, associate professor of nursing. "I was most inspired by the level of commitment of the students and their pride in their country and heritage," says Kreiger. "They have limited resources that cut across multiple areas — education, human resources, infrastructure — but they remain very forward thinking and are truly committed to providing the best possible care for their people."

Research will play a key role. In Sept. 2016, Mark McRiley, M.P.H. '12, was invited to Armenia to teach a course on qualitative research methods. (McRiley is completing a doctoral program in public health in England as part of a trans-Atlantic partnership between Southern and Liverpool John Moores University.) In Armenia, his research focused on smoking. He and his students investigated the perceptions and experiences of people in smoking cessation programs in the capital city of Yerevan. Among their findings — most adults in the study don't understand smoking is related to lung cancer, stroke, and heart disease. The research is slated to be published alongside a larger, complementary study of cigarette smoking in Armenia.

"The opportunity to teach in Armenia was rewarding," says McRiley, commenting in the Department of Public Health newsletter. "But the best part was getting to share in the students' accomplishments to further Armenia public health research. Their goal is to one day participate in implementing wide spread health benefits, but to receive recognition this early in their careers was beyond our wildest expectations."

By Villia Struyk

***Finding Beauty***
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She says she'll always be drawn to fashion and plans to revisit her dream of opening an online clothing store. But another issue has become a driving force as well. Working with classmate Asa Cort, Daley hopes to launch #trustfund, a seminar covering financial topics for young people and their families. "This seminar not only will cover money management, but also the important role education plays in developing financial stability," says Daley.

She notes that the goal of the project meshes closely with her work as a plus-size model — furthering her commitment to self-empowerment. "In my eyes, we need not associate the concept of beauty with a size, color, or shape. That is the industry I want to help build . . . the industry I am moving toward." ■

***Mercy Ship***
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Murphy, who bunked in a room with three other volunteers, found the experience rewarding and eye-opening. "It's tough to see people who are no different than us with dramatically different medical outcomes. The only thing that's changed is that they were born in a different country," she says.

She recalls one patient, Dinette, who at 26, came to the hospital ship with an obstetric fistula, a childbirth injury that is virtually nonexistent in the U.S. thanks to Cesarean deliveries. After losing two children in two different pregnancies, Dinette's husband abandoned her. Murphy learned from the woman's aunt that she had attempted suicide twice.

"She was my age. I couldn't imagine going through what she had," says Murphy. She notes that Dinette ultimately went through a positive transformation similar to Angeline's.

There were lighthearted moments, too. Like her encounters with the "Three Musketeers" — three teenage boys admitted with almost identical burns who became fast friends.

"They were always together, gabbing, and giggling. They would do their exercises in a synchronized fashion. It was so funny to see them egging each other on," says Murphy, who brought the trio a soccer ball after a trip to town.

In September, Murphy began her second assignment with the organization, this time traveling to the country of Benin in West Africa. She said her family backed her decision 100 percent. She recalls a social media post made toward the end of her first trip: "I had posted on Facebook that it was my last week of service, and my mom's comment was: 'Stay!'" ■

***Music Man***
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Fellow Stutzman Scholar Terri Lane was always drawn to music. At the age of 3, she'd sit at her grandmother's piano, pinging out songs playing in the background. By age 11, she was receiving classical voice training. She also was in the midst of surviving years of horrific child abuse, which continued until age 15 when she left home.

Lane planned to study music in college, a natural progression for a high school honors student. "That's when the tragedies — everything I had gone through with my family — essentially hit home and prevented me from going. But I always said I would go back," she says.

In 2013, she made the move, leaving a successful 20-year career in the fields of energy efficiency, sales, and marketing, much of it with United Illuminating. Through it all, she'd never left the music behind. Now a blues-inspired rock recording artist, Lane sang lead and backup on dozens of CDs. She also teaches three music courses at the University of New Haven — and is well on her way to earning her bachelor's degree in music at Southern.

She says receiving the Stutzman Scholarship was a defining moment. "I was shaking when I got the envelope," she says. "What the Stutzman family has done is so meaningful. They have built a wonderful legacy through their commitment to the arts and now I can be part of that forever." Stutzman, who shares his parents' commitment to education, says such stories offer the ultimate reward.

"The students love his courses because he is very organized, very responsive to students, and very engaging," says Hlavac of Stutzman, who received Southern's Outstanding Teaching Award in the adjunct professor category in 2014.

Stutzman credits highly interactive assignments with fostering student engagement. He was invited to present a poster on the topic at the College Music Society's national conference in October 2016. The presentation showcased Stutzman's First Year Experience course, "Thinking about Music," which he has taught for six years. The course culminates in a unique capstone project: after studying protest music, students compose a 75-second protest rap. Students have tackled a variety of topics, including 8 a.m. classes, cafeteria food, gun violence, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Fueled, perhaps, by the presentation, Stutzman says he's thought a lot about teaching methodology — and he says he knows he's found his true professional calling. "I mean no offense, but no one teaching the first semester of chemistry is going to learn anything about the subject from their students. But I have this wonderful opportunity to learn from them, and that is incredibly inspiring." ■