

Dear praying friends,

To see a Black Mamba snake or a Scorpion during a visit to the zoo or in a movie can give me goose bumps. But to actually see one in-person along the walking path is a different experience all together. Well, this is Africa, and she is introducing her natural wonders to me. I walk around here wearing my hiking sandals (floaters) all the time so I figure I better get serious and get myself a pair of rubber boots and a strong flashlight. Who knows what I'll step on during night calls. Sorry I can't show you photos, my laptop is sick.

Do you know somebody in your church or neighborhood who has been ill of Typhoid Fever? There was big news years ago about food items contaminated with Salmonella, and it was big news. Here every patient with a fever either has Malaria or Typhoid Fever. TyF is caused by the Salmonella bacteria acquired by eating contaminated food. The bacteria is easily killed by a course of antibiotics. But patients when they feel better, don't finish the whole treatment course. (I confess I don't ever finish a week of antibiotics myself, and I'm a doctor!) So the seemingly getting-better patient becomes very ill with a severe tummy ache. A frequent complication of TyF is perforated bowel. Yes, the small intestine (ileum) becomes red and develops holes, sometimes multiple holes. The intestinal contents leak out and so poison the whole tummy then the blood.

My youngest patient ever is a 3 year old girl weighing 9 kg (19.8 lbs). She was brought here because of high fever, big painful tummy and she refused to eat. Medical textbook says doctors should arrive at a diagnosis 80% based on history and physical exam, 20% on laboratories to confirm the diagnosis. Our laboratory is very limited, even less than the very basic tests. Anyway, this girl needed surgery clearly and so was prepared. She has 2 holes in her ileum & a belly-full of muck. A portion of the diseased bowel (ileum) was cut and sewn back together, evacuate muck & whole belly washed. Sounds simple enough. But this 3 year old only weighed 9 kg! For a chronically malnourished patient, wound healing and recovery takes much longer. And she won't be able to start eating until after 3 days, time when the sewn bowel is healed.

But God is gracious! His mercies are new every morning. As I check on her everyday I watch out for early signs of complications. I always come back rejoicing because she was recovering well and free of complications. She cries when she sees me. Praise God for answered prayers! She has gone home, with oral antibiotics to complete the treatment. I just pray she is better than her doctor and finishes her treatment.

Thank you for always praying for me. I have enough supply of gloves, my power drill is on its way, thank you Trinity UMC (Pomona, CA). I'm still nagging people so we can have running water in the Operating theater. Central UMC (Matthews, VA) is ready to help us get the water flowing, thank you very much. Electricity is still dicey in the middle of the night. Once I was doing my 3rd C-section at 2 am when they switched generators, we were standing in pitch darkness for 12 minutes. It felt like forever when one is supposed to be closing the belly! To fight off frustrations I have color-streaked my hair blond. That's because I can't find blue color. I like green but not for hair.

I'm sure you are smiling, that's great. Just don't forget to pray for me and my patients. God be with us.
—Doc Elma Jocson

