



Seven-year-old Hawa's benign tumor started growing about a year ago. Her family is from Sierra Leone. Her father Hassan looks for small diamonds, struggling to make a living. As he's spent more time lately protecting his sick child from those who taunt and would harm her, life has been increasingly difficult for the family. They sometimes go days without eating.

Hassan took his child to the hospital in Freetown, where doctors told him there was little hope. There was nothing they could do. She needed a surgeon. Even though it looked like his little girl would die, Hassan heard of the Mercy Ship's arrival in neighboring Liberia, and decided to make the difficult 2 day trip to visit the ship. It was his last hope for Hawa.

I first met Hawa at Saturday's patient screening. There was something different about her - a boldness, a fearlessness. She held her head high, and stared at the camera. Wondering how she was able to eat, I learned by watching as she cocked her head back unnaturally, opening her mouth. A small space appeared between the tumor and her lower lip.

Chief surgeon Dr. Gary Parker was concerned Hawa wouldn't be strong enough for the surgery - concerns that vanished when he saw her playing basketball on deck with one of the kids from the ship. She sank 5 in a row.

Six months later Hawa is at home and going to school in Sierra Leone. A crewmember is sponsoring her education.



Hawa recovers in the ship's ward.

Two volunteer surgeons removed the tumor in a three hour procedure.



HAWA