



It's early May and Professor Joseph Wwart is sitting on his bed in the pre-op ward onboard the Anastasis.

His dignified presence and self assurance are unable to mask his nerves at what's to come. He holds the left side of his face to one side but has taken off the tinted glasses he usually wears to hide his disfigurement. Tomorrow the Professor will undergo a procedure to rectify his collapsed eye cavity and to receive a state-of-the-art prosthetic eye.

In Liberia one assumes there are only two reasons why a man has a gaping cavity where his eye should have been: war-wound or accident. In Professor Wwart's case it's neither. Six years ago this genial 54-year-old professor of Business Management and Dean of the College of General Studies at the

The Professor

photo by Scott Harrison

...his physical appearance and efforts to hide his eye presented enormous physical and emotional challenges for the Professor.

University of Liberia had acid thrown into his face by an intruder. In an act he describes as “sheer mischief,” an unidentified man accosted him at his residence late one night and then fled. Nothing was taken, and the attacker has never been found.

“It all happened so quickly,” explains Professor Wwart. “Everyone was sleeping. This would never have happened if we had had electricity. If we had illumination somebody would have seen the intruder and raised the alarm. There was simply no light.”

The Professor emphatically points out that the attack could not have been an act of revenge or of war: he never had any known enemies and has always had “a good rapport” with his students. Now, years after the attack, he is sitting on a bed on a floating hospital ship hoping that

this senseless act against him can at least have a happy ending.

Like many others, Professor Wwart’s journey to the Mercy Ship has been a difficult one. The attack left the skin around

in the eye cavity and surgeons were unable to fashion a space that could successfully hold the prosthetic eye in place. Professor Wwart’s body rejected the implant and his eyelids eventually fused.



photo by Debra Bell

his right eye discolored. With time, this restored itself naturally. Shortly after the incident, a trip to a Ghanaian hospital saw his hopes dashed, when the prosthetic eye he received would not hold in place. Scar tissue had formed

He began to wear dark glasses, even in class. For a man used to teaching in front of large groups, a man to whom students turned for leadership and mentoring, his physical appearance and efforts to hide his eye presented enormous



physical and emotional challenges for the Professor. This is how it would be, he thought; he would have to live with his disfigurement or somehow raise enough funds to seek help from the world's top

procedures on Professor Woart. His fused eyelids were released, scar tissue around his eye was removed, and a prosthetic eye was implanted. The Professor also underwent a tarsorrhaphy –

About three weeks after his surgery, the Professor returned for his final check-up, just days before the Mercy Ship was scheduled to leave Liberia. His dark glasses were gone, and he was

This is how it would be, he thought; he would have to live with his disfigurement or somehow raise enough funds to seek help from the world's top surgeons. And this, he knew was an impossibility.

surgeons. And this, he knew was an impossibility.

And then the Mercy Ship came to town. Dr. Tom Elmer, a volunteer surgeon from the United States, performed a complicated series of

a process in which the eye is closed shut for 10 days; this procedure would help to ensure that his body would accept the prosthesis and minimize the chance of complications.

completely without pain. Smiling broadly, he even mentioned that he'd just given a mid-term exam that morning.

"I feel great," he said.