

It fell on Saturday

Yujah Saturday sat up and swung his feet nimbly to the side of the bed, making room for me to have a seat as though the narrow hospital bed was his living room. A thin towel was tied around his head and neck, covering the left-hand side of his face and hiding the tumor that had grown unchecked for ten years, devouring his eye and disfiguring his face. As we talked, he artfully tilted his head so that I could not see around the edge of the towel he had been wearing for so much of his life. At thirty-four, the tumor was a way of life—so much so that it even governed his body language and the way he held his head. I imagined him tying that towel for the first time, then the second, then the tenth, then the fiftieth, until the perfect knots were second nature and the angle was right on every time—hiding just the part of his face that he wanted disguised.

Yujah's face should not have been disfigured like this. His tumor had started out as a small benign growth that, had he had the luxury of regular checkups and medical care, could have been removed before it destroyed his eye—or his life.

Yujah, his four children, and his wife Lucille lived in a village in Grand Bassa where they owned a steam mill that they used to refine sugar cane. His eye wasn't so bad then, though the tumor had started, and they made a good living. But then the war came. Yujah and his family were forced to hide in the bush, where there were few resources, little food, and no medicine. They lived in fear that their children would be stolen or raped by soldiers. When the war was over, Yujah's tumor had grown large and the steam mill was gone.



But it was more than just the tumor and the war holding Yujah down. After I had visited with him a few times, he told me how he believed his face became so disfigured. One day, he said, he was in the bush when a torrential storm started. He took cover under a palm tree and waited for the rain to stop. The palm nuts were ripe, and a rat was eating one in the branches above him. The rat dropped the nut, and it hit his eye. Soon his eye began to itch and get big.

The next day it still had not stopped itching. Yujah's uncle said he could help to cure it and sent Yujah to a witch doctor, who gave him some medicine to put on it. Yujah travelled the two hours back to his home and applied the poultice. Within minutes, his eye started to get heavy, and by the time the night was over, his eye was big and had started coming out of his head. Yujah was horrified. He believed that three people in his village had wished this bad thing on his eye and persuaded the witch doctor to use "bad medicine" on him. Afraid that they might do worse to him, he and his family fled to Buchanan. He has never gone back to the village where he was born. When I asked him if he might consider it now that his eye was healed, he shook his head and said that they might do more medicine on him.

Strange explanation. This story is definitely very different from the perspective of doctors onboard the Mercy Ship. Dr. Gary Parker says the tumor began as a small growth, like most benign tumors, and grew for ten years, slowly pushing Yujah's face into a new shape. And Dr. Tony Giles believes that witch doctors only have tricks and magic to fool the people into believing and fearing them.

Yujah's sickness is more than just a tumor. It is fear and a misunderstanding of God's mighty power. Removing the tumor took two hours—a simple procedure that should have been performed ten years ago. How long will it take to remove his confusion and replace it with truth? How long to remove syncretism and replace it with a solid knowledge of God's love for him?

This, surely, is a much less simple procedure, but perhaps it has started in a small way. Yujah and I prayed before he left for a greater understanding of God's truth and that God's love would remove all his fear. He wanted the doctors and nurses to know that God healed him. "Everything is good with me. Thanks God for what He did," he said. And maybe, by hearing the crew explain that it was God who brought him to the ship and who called the surgeons to Africa—by making it clear that it was God who healed him—he has a little more understanding of the infinite power of God in his life. Yujah told me that Mercy Ships had given him hope—hope for a normal life, hope that he will get a new steam mill and support his family the way he used to, and perhaps hope that there is a power more mighty and loving than any power found in this world. Pray for Yujah, that he will continue to understand the depth and breadth and height of the God who rules over eyes and steam mills and even witch doctors.

-Kaitlin Domanoski

