



alumni profile

# SCOTT HARRISON / CAS '98

SHOWING THE WORLD SOME *MERCY*

by Nicole Pezold / GSAS '04

**F**or a decade, Scott Harrison (CAS '98) lived a dusk-to-dawn life as a successful events producer in New York City, promoting and partying with the latest music and fashion talent. Then he realized he was unhappy. "I asked myself what was the exact oppo-

site thing from nightlife?" Harrison recalls. His answer: a year aboard Mercy Ships, a charity of floating hospitals that for 27 years have docked off the coasts of the world's most desperate places to heal the diseases and disorders endemic to poverty—cleft lips, cataracts and benign tumors large enough to disable.

Armed with a couple of cameras and vague memories of a photography class he had taken as a journalism and mass communications major at the College of Arts and Science, Harrison embarked in October 2004 on his first tour as the Mercy Ship *Anastasis's* volunteer photographer. In Benin and Liberia since

MERCY SHIP ANASTASIS VOLUNTEER SCOTT HARRISON WITH CHILDREN FROM ROYESVILLE, LIBERIA. THEIR SCHOOL, LOOTED AND DESTROYED BY REBELS, HAS SINCE BEEN ROOFED AND REBUILT BY THE ORGANIZATION.

then, he has recorded the pre- and postsurgery faces of thousands of patients—many of whom have spent their lives as outcasts, ridiculed or stoned if they went out in public—unwittingly capturing their life-changing moments in stills.

This service has also transformed Harrison, awakening in him an intimate understanding of both the material poverty and spiritual wealth of those he meets. He has broadcast these thoughts, along with photographs of patients, in regular e-mail updates to friends and colleagues. In a recent epistle, Harri-

son introduced Joseph Jones, a 32-year-old Liberian who from boyhood had watched a benign tumor steadily take over his neck. Ten years ago, Jones also witnessed his family's slaughter at the hands of rebels. When he met Harrison on the ship's gangway, he told him he'd been praying to have his tumor removed for 20 years.

"I can only marvel at that kind of faith," Harrison mused in his message. "It seems far removed from the reality I have allowed myself. Could I suffer even five years with an enormous



tumor? Absorb scorn and hatred for something that wasn't my fault? Would I pray for deliverance to an unseen God for 20 years? And continue to believe?"

Jones's tumor was removed successfully last

says New York photographer Lyle Owerko, who saw the exhibit. "He's not a voyeur. He's genuinely concerned about these people and shocked by their ailments—as much as he is celebrant of their rebirth after surgery." To

“The power of those photos is his naiveté. He's not a voyeur. He's genuinely concerned about these people and shocked by their ailments—as much as he is celebrant of their rebirth after surgery.”

—PHOTOGRAPHER LYLE OWERKO

fall. “Each miracle I see here brings me a little closer” to believing, Harrison says. Such stories and pictures have also propelled him to ply his talents as a photojournalist. What started as a blog of his adventure snowballed into a flurry of journalism assignments, including a week-long stint in a leper colony. Last August in Manhattan, Harrison launched the first exhibition of his work on Mercy Ships. The show, titled “Mercy,” mapped the emotional journey each patient took from affliction to healing. In one series, Harrison photographed a woman, Marguerite, in an ecstatic dance. Her eye bandages had just been removed; she could suddenly see again for the first time in two decades.

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create the show, Harrison called on his former connections and skills as an events producer. He acquired \$250,000 in donated goods, including the venue, Metropolitan Pavilion Gallery in Chelsea, and raised \$90,000 for Mercy Ships during the 10-day run.

Harrison plans to take “Mercy” on the road this fall to introduce more patients who have marked his life—and whose faces and stories may inspire viewers to volunteer their own talents or resources as well. “I hope people find a sensitivity and heart for the poor,” he says, “that they see they're no different from us. They were just born poor.”

In the meantime, he'll be back on the ship. ■

To view more of Scott Harrison's work, visit [www.onamercyship.com](http://www.onamercyship.com).