

"You are welcome". That one phrase sums up my experience in Nigeria. I heard that phrase frequently from the time I stepped off the plane in Lagos, Nigeria on December 9, 2011, until I left on December 18. Our hosts for dinner greeted us with "you're welcome. Patient's greeted us with "you're welcome". I felt loved, embraced, and respected by my hosts, drivers, pastors, volunteers and new friends. I knew I was entering sacred territory when the whole plane of people clapped and yelled, "Alleluia, Praise the Lord", as the plane landed at Lagos International Airport.



To experience Nigeria, is to stimulate all of your senses, all of the time. The country is fast and daring and loud and creative. It smells like coconut and eucalyptus. It looks like beautiful Black faces, bright fabrics, and dusty roads. It feels hot and sticky. It sounds like blowing horns, people yelling, beautiful Christian music, and laughter... lots of laughter. It tastes like curry, hot peppers, juicy fruit, bananas and coconuts. My Africa experience was so full that I cannot describe it all. I started off taking pictures and journaling my trip but realized by day 2 that there is just too much to see to get it all on film or paper. We ate well, in big beautiful spacious homes, and some more humble homes, but always were treated like royalty.

## A Dream Fulfilled

*Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He'll give you the desires of your heart" Psalm 37:4*

Rachelle Burrell - My daily journal of the experience



The plan was to provide medical ministry to 3 clinics in Nigeria. Little did I know that the trip would be so much more. We were blessed to have the assistance of the honorable Pastor John Larayetan and his wife Shola Larayetan. Pastor John is a friendly, passionate and influential man who helped us navigate our way out of the airport and through Lagos city. He served as an interesting and knowledgeable tour guide. One of my favorite, most touching experiences is when Pastor John shared memories of his father, a pastor admired by many. Pastor Abraham Larayetan opened churches in Lagos (The Apostolic Church in the Badagry area). Pastor John Larayetan, allowed us to "feel" his father with him when we accompanied him to his father's church in Lagos. I was humbled and honored to be a part of that special remembrance time.

Shola Larayetan is a truly remarkable woman, who manages to raise 4 charming, well-behaved children, minister to hurting people, organizing meals for workers, and dresses stylishly every day. I watched her bargain with vendors without raising her voice. Her presence is so powerful and convincing she does not have to raise her voice. She is truly a woman of excellence. Speaking of women of excellence; Nigerian women are sharp dressers! Their brightly colored clothes were well fitted, featuring details such as asymmetrical zippers in the back. Many of the women that I observed carried themselves with such grace and confidence. I'm intrigued at how women are able to carry babies on their backs and loads on their heads. Nigerian women are women of strength and courage.

On day two we received a history lesson in Lagos. Anyone visiting Africa

should visit the slave museum. It is an unpleasant but very real part of our history. The Badagry Express Road is a road traveled by many captured slaves on their way to the Atlantic to be taken away from their home in Africa. My ancestors, people who shared my bloodline, walked this road. We drove this bumpy, dusty road, along with hundreds of cars, vans, mopeds and pedestrians. We saw miles of outdoor



door markets with goats, giant yams, clothes and whatever you needed all along the way. Then we arrived to the Barracoons where human beings were kept

crowded in a dark, hot building waiting to be shipped to Brazil, The West Indies or America. I couldn't help but feel rage and sadness as we viewed the chains that bound men, women and children. But, I see they did not break our spirit.

By day 3 we were in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. The Holy Spirit is large and embracing in Port Harcourt. You can't help but feel peace when you meet people with names like Mercy, Grace, Peace, Blessing, God's Favour, and Comfort. The faith in Port Harcourt is unashamed and real. There are church's on every corner, and some in between corners.

On Sunday we visited the headquarters of our health clinics, Open Doors Christian Centre in Port Harcourt. It is a church where people dance and sing in reverence for the Lord. Pastor John introduced the medical mission team,



and people cheered with such genuine gratitude and love that I knew I was with family. He announced that this was my first trip to Africa and the enormity of what this trip represented became clear. A dream that I've had since the age of 14 was actually here. My eyes were full of tears. I then had the pleasure of going to another church to hear the admirable and beautiful Shola Larrayetan encourage the congregation. I wept with joy after hearing her sermon on hope and the reassurance that God has not stopped cooking us yet. She used everyday terms to help us experience God's love.

Sunday evening I received a special gift. We were taken to a Christmas program featuring African dancers. I love all dance, especially African dancers and to be watching the real thing in the motherland was captivating. We were all invited to dance on stage and it felt like heaven; I couldn't stop smiling. Definitely one of the highlights of this trip. The Lord knows how much I love African art and dance. This was a special gift that I hadn't asked for but gladly received. Those strong, flexible, powerful, spiritual, dancers expressed with their bodies what can't be expressed in words. They demonstrated the hope, peace, and beauty of God that is evident even in the middle of oppression and chaos. They were able to portray the political climate in non-threatening ways. At that point I felt that if I had to go home to the United States that night I would have been content. I couldn't imagine anything better than that.

By the time Monday, day 4 arrived, I was excited, energetic and ready to work in the mission field. Our first Clinic was Open Door, Christian Centre in Port Harcourt. We were covered by prayers



and were full of the spirit before we started our clinic thanks to Pastor John and Shola. When we walked in, there were hundreds of people waiting to be seen, medically, and they were singing praise and worship songs as we walked in. Their songs of praise and worship were confirmation to me that God was in the midst and approved of this trip. I was able to pray with a woman whose child died at only two weeks of age. I believe that the opportunity to tell her story to someone and receive prayer along with donated medicine will greatly help to relieve her high blood pressure. People received malaria-counseling education, HIV/AIDS counseling and eye examinations. By the end of Tuesday we had served hundreds of people, providing medication for high blood pressure, diabetes and pain. We also provided spiritual food by our presence. As evening approached a woman cried while her 4-year-old daughter tried to comfort her. It was clear that she could not see well and her daughter was her guide. She was scared that the eye doctor would not see her and she thought she needed glasses. She was seen before the doors closed and she was so grateful. In spite of the large numbers we served, I was aware that there were some we could not serve. Our job is not yet done. I was sad about the ones we didn't serve and very happy about the ones we could.

On, Wednesday, day 6 of our mission trip, we were tired but happy and enchanted by the many people we met. We drove for an hour on dusty roads full of potholes and traffic to a rural clinic. The clinic in

Ahoada was smaller but the needs just as great. There were many people waiting outside, again, singing praise and worship songs as we walked up. One woman yelled out "thank you" and "God Bless" you to us, and once again I was touched deep in my soul. We saw

many children in Ahoada. Large families received treatment for every person in the family, perhaps some for the first time. I was called to minister to a woman whose blood pressure was dangerously high. We could provide medicine, but medicine alone can't solve her problem. Her blood pressure was high due to her stress. Her daughter and husband died recently. She said she did not have adults to talk to, only her children. She did not have any closure because her husband was not yet buried and she was in mourning. She did not know when and where he would be buried. She allowed us to pray for her. The children were excited to receive donated toothbrushes and showed us how they brush their teeth. I noticed the dress was different here, in that style was not so important. It did not matter if boys wore pink or if clothes matched. It seemed to matter only that they were clothed. One woman wore a hot sweater and I wondered how she stood the heat. Language was more of a barrier here. I learned that the Ekpeye language is spoken here. Much of my communication was a smile or a nod. People looked at me with curiosity when I spoke and I knew they did not understand what I said. I had to ask people to repeat what they said or seek interpreters. Some spoke words that none of us understood, but everyone seemed to understand caring. A loving volunteer taught me a Yoruba and an Ibo song to help me to learn the language. Both were praise songs, a language we all understand.

By Friday, day 8 we were exhausted but



fulfilled. Defence City, Open Doors Christian Centre is yet, another branch of the fruitful ministry of Pastor John and Shola Larayetan. This clinic was pleasantly breezy and moved at a slow steady pace. People were particularly friendly and grateful. The king of the community received care here. Three children befriended me when they saw that I was taking pictures. They enjoyed posing for pictures as well as taking pictures of others. Photography was a wonderful way to bond with the children. This day was bittersweet, as we had to say goodbye to all of the people working alongside us in this medical mission. There were people from Jamaica, Africa, and America working side by side to provide medical care to those most needy; just as God commanded. I was truly blessed to work with this group of compassionate Christians.

The week ended with a Christmas program on Saturday and church on Sunday.



Saturday's program was a Thanksgiving service where people donated needed items to the church in appreciation for all that their families had received. It's all about glorifying God. There were donations of banana's, TV's and other items. And people danced up to the alter, to give with gratitude. There were hugs and tears and laughs and dancing. I went to give, and instead I received.

"He will give you the desires of your heart." My African journey started years before that plane landed in Lagos. Maybe it started the first time I watched Roots in 1977. Maybe it was when I considered the Peace Corps after college. Maybe it started with my study of Black history. All I know is that the seed for me to go to Africa was planted very early. I didn't know it would be Nigeria until this year. The seed to serve was also placed early. I always knew I would work with people, and work with the poor. That's why I became a social worker. I help people deal with life stress and emotions that contribute to health problems.



God placed stepping stones before me. When my colleague Frieda told me about her first trip to Nigeria three years ago the possibility of really traveling to Africa became more real. She led me to The American Jamaica Link, a medical mission's team. Wow, here was an organization that wanted to help others in Africa! AJL represented a perfect marriage of my love of black history, my faith, and my desire to go to Africa. Then my mother died in June of 2011 and I was in need of a focus. Then, Freida gave me the number to Dr. Clyde Green. I told him, I didn't know what I could do, but I'd love to go. I sent him a resume and he allowed me to join his team. I thought I'd use my counseling skills, but instead I learned to be a pharmaceutical assistant. God meant for me to do just that. There are no coincidences; I felt strongly the pull to go to Nigeria. Even when I was told of the danger I might face in Nigeria, I felt the peace of God that surpasses all understanding. When I wondered how to pay for this trip, God provided the means.

This trip did not make worldly sense but it made a lot of sense spiritually. The lesson learned? Listen when God calls.

The collaboration between America Jamaica Link and Open Doors Christian Centre is true ministry. Dr. Clyde Green and Cheryl Green, his wife have put faith into action by dedicating their lives to providing health care to those in need, all over the world. They are willing to make the sacrifice of time and money to minis-



ter to others. Pastor John Larayetan and Shola Larayetan have dedicated their lives to ministering to others. All four of them ministered to me every day by their actions and words. Together they have gathered together physicians, nurses, and other dedicated volunteers. They manage to get medication and health care to hundreds of men, women and children.

There are 5834 miles (9388 km) between Atlanta and Lagos. That is not enough distance to keep God's family apart. I was blessed beyond measure by the many people who cooked for us, prayed for us, taught us songs, and dances, drove for us and loved on us.

*Thank you!*



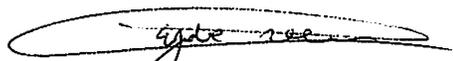
December 19, 2011

*Greetings from American Jamaican Link!*

*We would like to express a heartfelt thank you to all of the volunteers that served with us during our 2011 Medical Mission to Nigeria. It was a great privilege to work with such a hardworking, dedicated group. Together, we were able to serve and treat over 1500 under-served Nigerians and their families within a 5 day period. Your deeds have made an immediate difference and impact in the lives of these individuals. This mission was a huge success and we thank again for being willing vessels.*

*For the year of 2011, AJL has made 2 trips to Jamaica, 1 trip to Kenya, 1 trip to Central America, 1 trip to Nigeria; and together we provided medical care to approximately 5000 families. We impacted countless lives with our spiritual outreach, as well as, socially with our freight shipment to the community of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Thank you to all of you that gave your time, support, encouragement and prayers. We would especially like to thank our corporate sponsors: AmeriCares, Boys Scout of America, Brothers to Brothers Foundation, Khols AiA Team and Map International.*

*Our next mission will be to Saint Elizabeth, Jamaica and is scheduled for March 31, 2012 through April 8, 2012. The estimated cost of this trip is ~\$1200 (covers airfare, lodging, ground transportation and food). If you would like to participate in this mission, please visit the organization website, [www.usajalink.org](http://www.usajalink.org) and print and fill out the Volunteer Agreement. The Volunteer Agreement, \$250 non-refundable reservation fee, and all other supplemental materials should be sent to: AJL, 114 Ragans Drive, Gray, Georgia 31032 by January 15, 2012.*



Clyde Green,  
Co-Founder

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## **WHO ARE WE:**

American Jamaican Link was founded in 1995 to provide free health care to the rural poor in the United States (Georgia) and Jamaica. In 1999 the association expanded its services to include free medicine, educational, and spiritual service to the poor in Africa (Nigeria) and Haiti as well. Our management team consists of a board of directors. AJL is not a membership organization; services and activities are provided and carried out by people who are willing to give back to the community and share in our vision.

The American-Jamaican Link Charitable Foundation is an excellent outreach ministry to partner with. Any church, Sunday School class, civic group or person who has a desire to help those in developing countries from Jamaica to Africa can do so through AJL. Please consider becoming a partner or sponsor in helping to build the lives of those in need.

## **Within the USA, send all donations to:**

American Jamaican Link Charitable Foundation  
114 Ragan Drive  
Gray, GA 310321

## **Within Jamaica, send your donations to:**

American Jamaican Link Charitable Foundation  
New Bethel Zion Church, Parottee, PA.  
St. Elizabeth, Jamaica

The American-Jamaican Link Charitable Foundation is a 501(c) 3 organization and contributions are tax deductible. Please visit us at [www.usajalink.org](http://www.usajalink.org) for more information or the schedule for upcoming trips. You can also contact us by email at [info@usajalink.org](mailto:info@usajalink.org).

## **Dates for UPCOMING AJL Trips**

|                          |         |
|--------------------------|---------|
| March 31 - April 8, 2012 | JAMAICA |
| July 1 - July 8, 2012    | JAMAICA |
| Oct.15 - Oct. 25, 2012   | KENYA   |
| Dec.13 - Dec. 22, 2012   | NIGERIA |