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When "Me" turns to "We"

Two remarkable young women, volunteers with Children's Surgery International, lead the way for the dozens of young people who are helping other young people in far flung corners of the world, and learning profound lessons in gratitude and generosity. This issue features stories about young CSI people who are helping with foreign teams, changing their career goals because of past mission trips, raising money here at home to send others abroad and, in general, delving into the gratitude of love and learning that comes from generosity.

Both Christine Hehre and Emmi Brytowski will tell you that none of what they did was easy. Much of it was uncomfortable. But all of it was amazingly fun and spirit filled. They both learned that they "got" as much or more than they "gave" on their mission trips and that the youngsters they helped in Liberia and Mexico gave them profound lessons in laughter, love and the humanity we all share! [Here are their stories:](#)



Emmi Brytowski, 18, went to Liberia in January 2010, where the team worked at Duside Hospital on the Firestone Plantation.

"Being the youngest member of the team, and my first time out of the country, I had little trepidation being surrounded by so many warm and kind team members," she wrote. However, on the first day at the

hospital, "I became overwhelmed at the sight of so many hopefuls awaiting their turn to see the doctor, a bit excited nonetheless to assist the team in any way possible." She helped interview prospective patients. "It is amazing how quickly one can adapt to the language never having spoken it before, when it is the only way of communication. During the two day screening process we saw about 200 patients with an impressive surgery schedule of 140."

The days quickly became routine: Up with the rooster at 6 a.m. and arrive at the hospital at 7 a.m. "Each day we were surrounded by a new, devastating crowd of hopeful parents begging for their children to be seen. Being kind hearted people, the surgeons made additions to the already packed surgery schedule for a few lucky children. I had the privilege of making my way around the hospital and seeing every side of the surgery process: From the pre-op, playing with children and anxious mothers, to the post-op, watching the first minutes of the kids after waking up from surgery, to the recovery room where nurses were met with curious mothers and their crying children. I even had the once in a lifetime opportunity of being in the operating room to witness, first hand, the life altering surgeries.

"Throughout the week I was able to make intimate connections with the families and the patients, hearing their stories, and getting to know them personally. The fast friends I made and the memories created on this fantastic opportunity given to me will forever be cherished."

Christine Hehre, 23, was thrilled when chosen to go to Hermosillo, Mexico. But she worried: "What would the conditions be like? How would I cope with seeing patients who had to be turned away, children who were in pain, or families who were severely poverty stricken? I really had no idea what to expect."



But immediately upon arriving, the group was greeted by parents in English. They had been practicing their greeting all day. "They were very grateful we had come, and I couldn't help but tear up as they applauded us and led us into the hospital. It was a very real moment, one of immense emotion on both parts, and I can only imagine that is what real gratitude feels like."

She spent most of her time checking patients post surgery and was able to witness "the amazing transition that occurs for the children and the gratitude of the families manifest in the reality of a child's new smile." But for Christine, it was one smile in particular, that will stay with her forever.

A young boy had some complications after his first surgery and he had to be returned to the operating room.

"He was still asleep coming out of surgery, so I sat by his bed and was there when he woke up. He saw me when he opened his eyes, and though he was in a lot of pain, gave me a smile. As grateful as he was that I was there to keep him company, the gift he gave me was by far greater.

"I will never forget that smile."

Two people tied together by a simple gift to each other: A smile. "As a future provider myself, this is an experience that will shape my practice, against which I can set my standards. The quality of teamwork was phenomenal and an example of what volunteer work should do. Although we're not there to get along or to become better people providers, but somehow we do. I believe it's because we're there for the children."

Where Are They Now?

A report on CSI Youth Team members from the past

For many years, Children's Surgery International has had a program in which young people 16 years and older raise money to go as a youth team member on a CSI mission. They return from their experience changed in many ways. Their view of the world has greatly expanded, they often change what they want to study in college and, in many cases, set new goals for their careers. According to Mary Bowen, CSI Youth Advocate and sponsor of many of our youth, "I hope that CSI continues its youth program. It influences these young adults more than we might think. They have goals and plans to make the world a better one."

We asked former youth team members to tell us something of their experience while on their mission. **Johnathan Kibort** replied, "The Hermisillo mission was incredible. Although we may have been in one of the hottest cities in Mexico, we rarely saw the light of day. The hours were long, but the camaraderie and teamwork that everyone displayed trying to help the patients made the days extremely satisfying. I knew I wanted to go into medicine since high school, but honestly, the way the nurses, anesthetists, and doctors all worked together to help these kids really pushed me toward pediatrics. And, these guys were good. The surgeons performed the procedures with such dexterity and skill, they made them look easy. I remember one anesthetist making miniature bicycles during his free time to give to the patients and families. Everyone loved them, even the local nurses wanted these. These people cared. And they helped make the lives of children and their families better. It was something profound and inspirational."

Elizabeth Tiffany, also on a mission to Hermosillo, Mexico wrote, "I started my second year at New York University this fall. Though I'm currently undecided about my major, I'm thinking about English and Communications. I don't yet have a clear career choice, but the CSI trip is definitely shaping the direction I'd like to go in. I'd love to work with children, a child/adolescent centered company, or for a company that benefits children in need and educates the public about ways to help children in the U.S. and around the world."

When Spanish-speaking **Francisco Diez** was 16 years old, he was one of the youth on a mission to Chiclayo, Peru. His language skills proved invaluable throughout the entire mission, but were particularly important in helping get the main team through some difficult issues with Peruvian customs. When Francisco applied to college, his report on the experience with CSI was instrumental in his being invited to enter Georgetown University. He wrote, "Once in Chiclayo, I went to work, interpreting the intentions of patients and doctors to each other right before the first day of surgery. I was originally to serve as someone to comfort families and to entertain children, but by necessity, I was stationed as operations interpreter and logistical assistant. My experience in most of these fields made me a novice, but the effort behind each action grew by day. After having become used to the smell of cauterized blood, North Peruvian Highland Spanish dialects and a slightly familiar, yet alien culture, I came to realize inexplicably, that I could do this type of work and I would be satisfied. The immediate importance of my actions changed the way I view diligence. Carrying anesthetized children into surgery and comforting stressing mothers affirmed me of my abilities talents and passions. When I returned to the States, I entered a new semester

keeping my memories of Chiclayo close. I became reengaged in new classes with renewed emphasis and effort, especially those of the social sciences. With the encouragement from my former team mates of the Chiclayo mission, I rediscovered a passion for history and politics. Ultimately, I was able to find that my search for my future would lay best in a place where my convictions and talents lay, regardless of the uncertainty."

Francisco's moving essay not only impressed admissions people at Georgetown, but also at Harvard, Yale and other universities where he applied. He received many offers but started at Yale University this fall. He and his parents, Francisco and Claudia, have helped with every Passport to Smiles Gala since they began six years ago. This fall his sister Maria was a youth team member in Hermosillo, Mexico using her Spanish speaking abilities to help the mission go smoothly.



University sophomore **Kate Parrott** also went on a mission to Hermosillo, Mexico in 2008. She writes, "An outstanding memory for me is the moment we arrived to the CIMA hospital. There were tons of children, parents, family members and volunteers of the hospital to greet us. The women volunteers were dressed in crazy fairy and clown costumes and they were singing, yelling, blowing bubbles and dancing about the street. It was a great memory and I felt very appreciated and welcome at that moment. The Hermosillo mission trip rekindled my love for Spanish, so I am now pursuing a major in the language. I am also planning on majoring in Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences in hopes of later becoming a speech therapist. Watching and listening to the children in the hospital struggle to speak with their cleft lips and palates broke my heart. Communications is key to any developing child and each and every one of them deserves an equal opportunity to communicate with their family and make friends with their peers. I would have to say that the CSI mission trip definitely gave me the drive and desire to become a speech therapist. I hope to travel in the future with CSI on their post-surgery missions to help the kids get used to their new lips and mouths. I want to give back to CSI what they gave to me. It is clear that my experience impacted my life today and my future tomorrow."



A recent graduate of the University of St. Thomas was another team member in Hermosillo and was on our first mission there in 2005. **Christa Niznik** reports that, "This experience impacted my life beyond measures. I never thought I would have the opportunity to witness such an incredible life-changing event. The staff I went with was phenomenal-watching them take time out of their lives to go

(continued on next page)



Where Are They Now? *continued*

and offer free services to these people was inspiring. My favorite memory from the trip involved a little boy names Luis. He and I formed such a wonderful bond. He was so energetic and his parents were some of the most grateful people I have ever met. Despite the language barrier, we were able to form such an incredible bond over our admiration for their brave son and his life-changing experience. I would love to be able to see where Luis is now, five years later, and how his life has been changed for the better since his surgery. I will forever hold this as one of the most beneficial experiences of my life and will forever be grateful that I was given this opportunity. I am now a life-long volunteer of CSI because I have seen first-hand the impact it has on the child, the family, the community, the doctors, the volunteers and everyone involved."

Ron and Joan Cornwell



Of the many major benefactors of CSI, few have contributed as much to us as Ron and Joan Cornwell. As partners in Medical Arts LLC, Ron and Wayne Rice have generously given CSI free office space for seven years in the Medical Arts Building where Administrator Sue Baysden hangs her hat. We use the office for receiving contributions, planning fund raisers, meetings, storage and sorting of supplies as well as a point for shipping and delivery of our medicines, supplies and machines.

Ron and Joan have been patrons of CSI since the inception of Passport to Smiles, often filling a table with their friends. In addition, Ron has offered executive lunches and golf games at his Arizona golf club on several occasions as an auction item for our spring gala. They have brought in large sums of money and have proved popular in the past.

As a former CSI Board member, Ron is familiar with the work it takes to operate an organization as busy and complex as Children's Surgery International. In spite of many years on the Board, Ron had never served on a mission team until our 2004 trip to Arequipa, Peru. He and daughter Heather, a teacher and mentor of children in Arizona, shared the responsibility of medical records on that busy mission where close to 100 surgeries were performed. Ron was teased by some of the doctors who, noticing how busy Ron was while taking records, helping with logistics and performing other tasks, asked when he was ready to perform surgery! He did everything but that, we all observed.

Ron said of that experience, "The mission gave a new life to children who, because of their society, were ostracized and literally didn't want to come out of the closet. In a matter of a few hours, they were given that new life. It was wonderful to see them arrive, some on the back of pick-up trucks, traveling a great distance with family members, in anticipation of getting their lips and palates repaired." In conclusion, Ron added that, "it was a very humbling experience to been part of the team. it was also heartening to see people with so little, given an opportunity for a new life." We at CSI are deeply indebted to the Cornwells and Wayne Rice for their generosity in providing us a space, at no charge, in which to operate our organization. Muchas gracias!



Maria Tibesar and friends doing a bake sale



*Mack Scott,
Organizer of Smiles
for Kids Fundraiser*



*Students at Wayzata High School who were part of
the Smiles for Kids Fundraiser in Plymouth*

LOVELY NIGHT FOR THE ANNUAL

It's not too soon to mark your calendar for the CSI Seventh

More than 225 people filled the dining room of the Town and Country Club for the annual Passport to Smiles Gala. They had fun; they met their friends, they reconnected with pals who have gone on shared mission trips; they laughed; they placed silent auction bets on dozens of items; they watched an inspiring video about CSI's work in Liberia; they listened to an inspiring



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AL PASSPORT TO SMILES GALA

Annual Gala April 16, 2011 at the Millennium Hotel Minneapolis

message of thanks and future plans from David Vuich, representing the Serbian Government; and ended the evening with a rousing auction led by Pat Brenna.

The evening earned CSI more than \$100,000, which will translate into literally hundreds of new smiles around the world. Here are many of their faces!



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& Barbara Forster*



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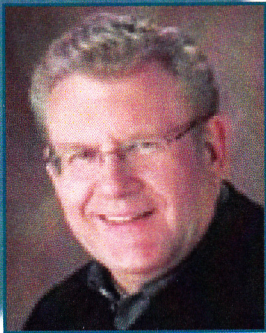
CSI volunteer Lora Stege Koppel goes on CSI trips to Liberia when she can. The block where she lives in South Minneapolis was having a neighborhood garage sale and the little kids had a corner lemonade stand. Koppel had "scored" a used wheelchair for Liberia, and was unloading it from her car during the sale and the kids gathered around and asked her about it. She showed them photos of the Liberian children and told the neighborhood children about the mission. Pretty soon, generosity broke out all over the 4800 block of Emerson Ave. in south Minneapolis:

We made a big sign and hung it on the front of the wheelchair, 'Wanted, used toys and books for Liberia.' Later that day she looked out at the wheelchair and discovered a pile of toys and books. Youngsters came up to her saying things such as, "Can you take this? I still play with it, but I have other toys. Here is one of my favorite books." And the crowning jewel: The day's profit from the lemonade stand, \$4.10.

"As I pack up the last few items for this trip I remember the promise I made to the Emerson Ave. kids. I will take the pictures of you with me and show them to the kids at the hospital, so they know who gave them these toys. I will take their picture and bring it back to you so you can see who now has your toys."

*The
CSI Family
wishes you all
a Happy
New Year!!*

**Next issue, profiles of our
newest board members
Thomas Fansler &
Tim Lander, MD**



CSI Board Member Welcomes John Hehre.

A hearty welcome goes to John Hehre, who was introduced to us by Board Chair Lora Koppel. The Hehre family got involved with CSI through the donation of part of the profits of a boutique which John's wife Marian has each year. Daughter Christine, 23, soon became involved as a youth team member on our Hermosillo mission and volunteered to serve on the committee for this spring's successful Passport to

Smiles gala. The Hehre's younger daughter, 17 year old Kathryn, looks forward to rounding out the family's CSI involvement by going on a mission as a youth member in the future.

In the corporate world, John is a member of the Platinum Group, a management consulting firm which guides companies through critical transitions. His undergraduate degree in engineering from Cornell University and his MBA from Harvard University have already begun to pay dividends in helping us expand our donor base and in helping us with our future growth and development program. We are particularly pleased that John has undertaken the task of heading the Development Committee on the Board of Children's Surgery International.

John looks forward to being a member of the team on our upcoming January 2011 medical mission to Liberia. His job on that mission will be to help with logistics, photography, scheduling and assisting with the myriad of other tasks asked of non-medical personnel. Many of the people whom he has met since getting involved with CSI have shared their enthusiasm with him about the life changing experience that happens while on location with a CSI mission. John feels that his job of helping with development for CSI will be enhanced by the upcoming mission and will share that experience in a future newsletter.

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