

The Mercy Ship - another unbelievable story

A boy of 18 - Don Stephens, from Colorado in the early 1960's had a vision for a hospital ship to visit Africa - at 24 he went to Calcutta and a friend introduced him to Mother Theresa - she asked him 3 questions:- Why was you born? What is your dream and why did God put you on this Earth - he blurted and bumbled but told her his dream of a hospital ship to visit Africa, she replied this is the reason you were put on earth - follow your dream.

He struggled over the years to secure funds, on many occasions he was asked by the banks, 'Did he have any maritime qualifications' 'No', 'Did he have any medical qualifications' 'No' 'and you want to put a hospital ship to sea for Africa? After many many years, somehow, he managed to secure the funds from a Swiss Bank as a Swiss old man was on the board of the bank and said 'give him a chance'. They then found an old cruise ship which was being sold by the Italian Government, however the Greek Government wanted to buy it. Now because the Italian Government was worried about the Greek cruise market they sold it to Don for its 'scrap value' i.e a million pound whereas the Greeks were offering 2.4 million! So 24 years ago 'Africa Mercy' sailed for Cameroon, not without incident – they arrived there to find they had no fuel for the generator to work, so they went out with petrol cans to the local petrol station to get the generator working - basically filling a water pistol to fuel the engines! They run out of food. They prayed. Don's wife came running in and said 'Don, fish are jumping out of sea', they rushed out to find that fish indeed were jumping out of the sea onto the deck and quayside. He said, he being a cynic threw one back, to which it jumped out again! 8000 fish on the dockside were gutted by the crew, they were pickled, smoked, salted, frozen enough fish for a month!

The people of Cameroon are slightly different than us Brits, they were all queuing up to see the 'white ship' and this girl was dying as the tumor was restricting her throat - they manhandled her over heads to get her to the ship where she was taken on board for immediate surgery - 8 years later, she is studying nursing to return and volunteer back on the ship!

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