

05/08/2026 Las Palmas

Hello !

Time flew by; so many things have happened since we left Switzerland. We had already written a newsletter in the meantime, but I am going to revisit a few points for those who are just joining us, and also to mark this first newsletter that we will also be translating into German! Indeed, following the publication of the article about us in *Migros Magazine*, many people have joined our adventure from across the Sarine border too.

Part 1, in flight: I am writing these lines above Sydney (Canada ;-), with Nayah-Lou lying down, her head on my thigh. She is sleeping, and that is a very good thing. I don't really know how to tell what time it is: 11:10 PM in Sydney, 4:10 AM in Madrid, and 9:10 PM if we had stayed at the International Support Center (Texas). We have been flying for 4 hours now, and the "fasten seatbelt" sign has not turned off once...



Texas: Almost 5 weeks in the heart of Texas—some might wonder if they got the wrong family, thinking they were following a family leaving on a ship to Africa!? This step is mandatory for "long-term" volunteers (> 12 months). Between the basics of becoming a (certified) maritime crew member, learning the foundations of the organization (NGO), how it works and its history, and how to better navigate the transition personally AND as a family, these 5 weeks went by quickly. The final week was spent helping with the maintenance of various communities in the area; it was mostly an excuse to get us working together and strengthen our bonds, putting into practice what we learned, before joining the other volunteers who are already on the ship. In reality, these community service actions should have taken place on or near the ship, but due to maintenance work, we could only join the *Global Mercy* now. A similar second week is planned during the crossing: around

August 7, we should weigh anchor in Las Palmas, Canary Islands, to head to Ghana.



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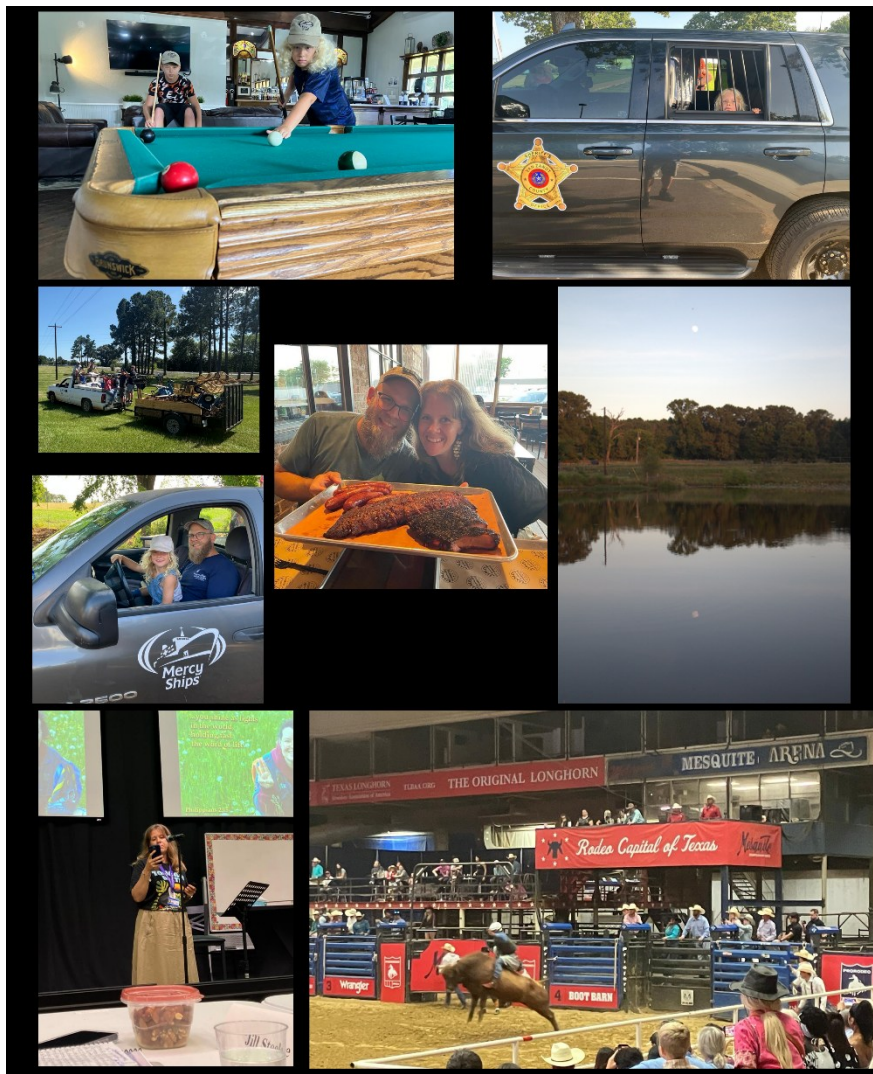


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Some of you may have seen photos circulating or on our website: we took the opportunity to discover a bit more of Texan culture during our stay. We also got to spend more quality time with the paternal grandparents, who were there for two weeks: their presence was necessary to accompany the boys to their prep classes (in English of course!) and to look after Nayah-Lou.

Introduction to culture shock:

Just as I am wondering how to approach the topic of "Texan" culture, I realize it is a great illustration. Mentioning just a few subjects is probably enough to stir up various emotions among you: for example, rodeos, pickup trucks, firearms, politics, and church... We were also confronted with various feelings, positive ones but sometimes less so. The culture shock will likely be different again once we arrive in a "non-Western" country, and one of the poorest! And how will the children experience it, with a school, food, drinking water, and air conditioning on board, but in contact with life stories so far removed from our own?!



While we hope they gain a "richness of mind" from it, it will also be a major challenge for each of us individually, as a couple, and as a family! We are convinced that this transition time was both necessary and beneficial. And it is with confidence that we are joining the *Global Mercy*. We were getting impatient and are thrilled to finally discover our family cabin, the maritime environment, and to sail. But it won't be *The Love Boat*! Even though we also hope to experience beautiful moments (visiting 1 or 2 things in the Canary Islands, sharing moments on board, marine wildlife), we will also have to acclimate to our new "home," and



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school and various activities will already begin during the crossing! I also mentioned the second week of our "Field practice"!

A few anecdotes :

- In Texas, everything is BIG! The flags, the cars, the landscapes... for example, right near the Mercy Ships center, there is a plot of land for sale (for anyone interested): 400 acres, which is a 4 km x 4 km plot of land!!! *(Note: 400 acres is actually about 1.6 km², but the phrasing reflects your text).*
- Nayah-Lou is playing with other children: a 5-year-old British boy made her repeat numbers from 1 to 100 (!) while they were sitting in a cart, but she also plays "baby" with a 15-year-old American girl. We don't know what accent she will pick up (her teacher comes from Norway ;-), but she is already learning lots of words!!!
- The boys are already starting to understand basic things and make themselves understood on their own, for example, getting served food, with or without vegetables, "spicy?". And it's safe to say we don't see "much of them" anymore: they eat at the table with their friends, go play with them, do Rubik's Cubes™, ...
- Cultural differences will be experienced, and are already being experienced among us (we volunteers represent over 40 nationalities on board!): even just when it comes to tipping one of our volunteer teachers: who gives how much? Does everyone "have" to contribute? And do we also give something for the other volunteers or not?!
- Arriving as a visitor at a rodeo... the sheriff called me out because of our "HopeShipFamily" family sweater with the Mercy Ships logo... until I realized his wife works at the Mercy Ships reception! So the next time I saw him, he was coming out of the center's pool in a swimsuit with his wife. Nayah-Lou even got to sit behind the wheel of his car (and in the back seat surrounded by bars ;-), and I took the opportunity to trade one of his badges.
- Nayah-Lou really loved seeing the elephants (at the zoo... then on TV). Will we see them in the wild one day???
- I got to drive a pickup truck with a trailer (on the Mercy Ships property) and practice backing up: it had been a dream of mine for a long time (I love driving... but had never really had the opportunity to do it with a trailer). This approach allowed us to save on plastic bags and work more efficiently... and even Nayah-Lou got to "drive"!



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Mercy Ships and Faith? With all these changes, it is important to know who we are and where we are going. Some people have asked us, "But do you have to believe?" to go with Mercy Ships, or "What is it like?" Well, faith is not mandatory; you just have to accept that life on board is steeped in what we might call "Christian" convictions. As for long-term volunteers (>12 months), these are people like us who leave behind a large part (if not all) of their lives to come on board. To hold out over time, you need to feel comfortable. I cannot say that faith is "mandatory," but I think I can say it is a precious help—though even here, there are exceptions. As for us, we have already learned a lot about ourselves, and we are discovering different aspects of faith and trust in God that we will surely experience again and again.

For instance, because of ongoing discussions with Ghana, it turned out that the usual shipping of private belongings with Mercy Ships containers was no longer possible. The problem was that we had sent 5 boxes (about 20kg each!) which were sitting in Rotterdam (another Mercy Ships logistics hub). So, we prayed that our belongings could leave with the last container bound for Las Palmas... but time was running short... in fact, it seemed downright impossible. A miracle? The next containers are leaving for Ghana, meaning they won't take personal items... It brought up a lot of emotions, thinking about the keepsakes people gave us before we left; Noâm's birthday present received before our departure, the one for Lyas (August 25th), Nayah-Lou's favorite dolls... but "nothing is impossible to those who believe." And finally, just as we were expecting confirmation that our belongings were stranded in Rotterdam... not only did they ship, but they have already arrived on the vessel! The Dutch team took it to heart to arrange for volunteers with belongings stuck in Holland to get them on board the *Global Mercy* "no matter what" before it left the Canaries. They then negotiated (and I heard through the grapevine it was for a trivial price) to send the remaining items by plane!

For nearly two weeks, we tried to trust. Watching the deadlines pass, we "no longer believed it." Yet, while we were praying that our things could be loaded into a container, God used another way (literally) to answer our prayers. We are so grateful! You might say this is very material, and we completely agree, but during these transition periods, with a whole family and children ranging from "toddlers" to "tweens/teenagers," and when ALL our belongings fit into one large and one small suitcase per person, you appreciate the gesture of our "colleagues" in Rotterdam in a whole different way!



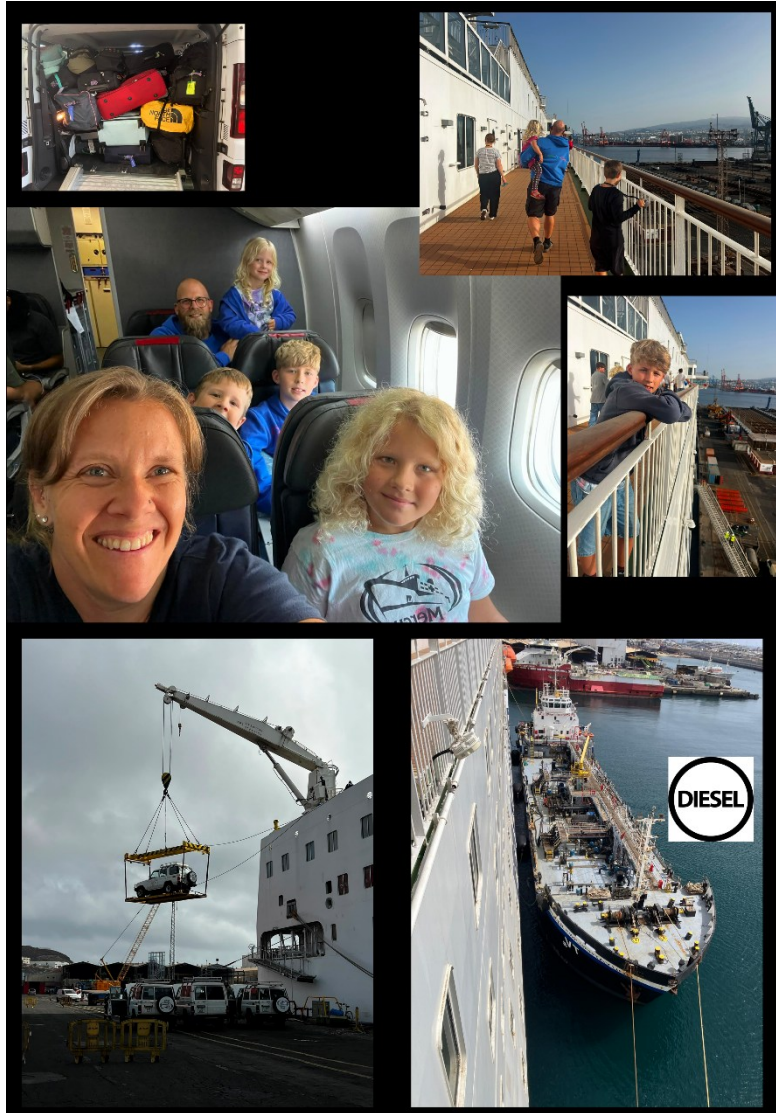
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Part 2: On Board We arrived on the ship two days ago. Time flies, and we have been very busy unpacking and organizing our cabin for the whole family. Our boxes finally arrived, so we were able to set up our "home" for the next 2 years. Our cabin is quite centrally located on the ship, on the starboard side, and we are lucky to have a cabin that is a tiny bit larger than the others (space allocation on board?).

There are some surprises, of course. We brought certain things that we won't be able to use at all (fire regulations are quite strict in particular), but it is also important that standards are respected and occasionally reminded. For example, we had "inherited" a toaster from the previous occupants which is actually banned. Knowing my wife and me, it was to be expected that we would quickly tackle setting up our "home sweet home," which is pretty much done now!



An Example of Encouragement : Tonight, I had to cross the city of Las Palmas, and to get back, I took a taxi after missing the bus. I had a basic chat with the driver about the reason for my stay: "vacation or work?" Lacking an easy answer, I explained what we were going to do, as volunteers, as a family, etc. And just as I was getting out, she told me the ride was free as a thank-you for our commitment! I am not really writing this just for the anecdote, but mostly because at that moment, I was deeply touched. She was so determined not to let me pay; there was no doubt in her words or on her face. I was truly touched by her attitude (perhaps even more than by the gesture itself)!



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More Technical Details : Today was "refueling" day: we "tanked up" as some would say, with an actual bunker tanker docking alongside us to deliver diesel (unless I am mistaken). It even took two vessels to deliver the some 1,600 tons of fuel! Oh, by the way, yesterday we toured the ship all the way up to the bridge, and our captain (a widower who will actually be making his last crossing before retiring at over 70 years old—very charming) explained to us that we actually have electric engines! Two at the back, attached directly to the propellers, and the whole pod can rotate, which is also very practical for lateral movements.

School : It will start next week (Tuesday, August 11th) during the crossing, so out at open sea!

Challenges :

- To integrate into different groups
- To improve English fluency and build deeper relationship

Ideally, we are looking:

- To strengthen our circle of financial supporters...

LAURA Noam NAYAH-LOV
Philippe Lyas MAHE

"In the Next Issue": We will either be at sea (with very little internet connection) or probably already arrived in Ghana... there will be even more of a change of scenery and surely lots of beautiful colors... don't hesitate to check our website from time to time, which now features:

- A photo gallery (for the most beautiful ones)
- A "flash" news section on the homepage, just to keep it updated 😊
- A WhatsApp "Impressions" feed, which can also be found on the "general" blog
- Perhaps we will start updating the blog regarding school; the kids start next week, out at sea! This will also be an opportunity to address the topic of "third culture kids" in our newsletter...



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