Hello everyone! This past week has been both exciting and tiresome. To start with, let me share with you about the Harvest Celebration at church last week. They condensed all the Masses into one in the morning, so the church was packed and hotter than usual. When the time came for the offertory and the gifts to be brought forward, they began the procession. There were at least 100 parishioners that came forward down the center aisle bringing gifts of the harvest. There were sacks of potatoes, onions, vegetables, fruit, whole branches of bananas, pop, juice, fans, chairs, soap, toilet paper…you name it, they brought it! There were even a few people carrying live chickens down the aisle! The line was so long, two by two, toward the front of the church to have the items blessed that it took about 10 minutes just to get everyone in! All of the items were then brought outside to the courtyard and used to prepare a harvest feast while we finished the mass celebration. It was so awesome!

The best part of all of it was afterward. The harvest picnic was also a fundraiser to put a new roof on the church, so the priests really encouraged us all to attend. When we went to leave out the front gates, we found them padlocked! We then went to the side gate and that too was locked. We had no choice but to go through the picnic! That is one way to make people attend I guess! Haha

To jump back a day, on Saturday, I took a trip to Bong Mines via train. We took one of the land rovers from the ship and drove it to the train station where it was loaded onto a flat bed car. It was about a three hour trip by train through the countryside of Liberia. It was beautiful! We sat on top of the Land Rover for part of the trip, but the vehicle was right behind the smoke stack! I tied a bandana around my face and pulled my hat on tight to keep the smoke out of my face…it didn’t really work. I lasted for about an hour or so on top and by the time I came down, I was as black as a chimney sweep!

Bong mines are an old iron mine that was shut down with the last war when the rebels came through. It is a beautiful county with lakes made from mining into the mountains and old structures dotting the landscape. The man taking us on the trip was Odacious; he used to be a mechanic for the trucks that worked in the mine, but he now works on Mercy Ships. It was interesting having first-hand accounts of how the place used to operate. I got to see where the trucks were kept, where the rock was crushed then ground into a fine powder for shipping out. Odacious also showed us sadder places, like where he was when the rebels showed up and killed some of his friends who were part of a certain tribe. He also showed us this beautiful mountain lake that used to be the dumping grounds for bodies during the war because it was far enough away that the rebels wouldn’t seen murdering thousands of
people there and hiding the evidence! It was awful thinking of such a beautiful place being desecrated by such atrocities.

At work, we have closed down 2 of the four wards and began to clean them from top to bottom. I have had 2 cleaning days and have worked my fingers to the bones! The place was disgusting! To put it lightly, Liberian people do not have the same, shall we say, standard of hygiene as we do in the states. I won’t go into any great detail for those of you with softer stomachs, but let’s just say that even though I initially thought it was crazy that we had scrub everything 3 times, by the end of the day I was grateful that it was done AT LEAST three times!

My little Marie went home this week, and Baby Eddie came back for his checkup appointment. He is doing well and the sores on his head are healing nicely. We have a little boy named Esau on the ward right now who my heart just goes out to every day. He was found to have Burkett’s Lymphoma, a cancer that is common in children. He is 6 years old and has already lost 1 eye. We started him on Chemotherapy last week and he is doing wonderful! Last week he could barely get out of bed and the bleeding from his eye was unstoppable. This week, we are playing and dancing and having a wonderful time! I just pray over and over that his time on earth will be blessed though, for it will not be long that he is here. For now though, his spirit and his body are strong and his laughter is so contagious that he has the whole ward entertained every day!

Lastly, the Lord just keeps reminding me how loving and thankful the people are here. We went to Mama Vic’s orphanage on Wednesday for the weekly Bible study and we were met with a surprise from the groups that we have been working with. \{I am not sure if I have mentioned this before, but this is the group that Josh and Sarah have been helping for over a year now. There is a girl’s Bible study and a boy’s. Next week is also probably the last time that Sarah or any of us will ever see them again\} Everyone involved with the Bible study sat in a circle with us included as they began the “ceremony.” They sang some songs for us and then Mama Vic got up and thanked us all, especially Josh and Sarah, for the differences that they made. Since the beginning of the Bible study, she said that she was able to see changed in the children in how they act, how they pray, and how they treat one another. It was nice realizing that what they have been studying for the past year or more is actually making a difference and God is truly
working with them. Then, they presented us all with African gifts – dresses for the women and shirts for the men. They were beautifully embroidered and brightly colored! I almost cried! These people, who have so little to live on, bought gifts for us. It was also comical because instead of us opening our own gift, this tradition here is that they each open the gift for us, in front of us, and then dress us in the gown that we received. (Overtop of our clothes we already had on of course) It was an amazing, humbling experience that I will never forget.

That is all for this week. Soon I will be home! Two more weeks and I will be boarding that plane again!