

-  THE VOICE 6th August 2011

Teen's mission of mercy

As a baby, Niki Tucker's life was saved by volunteers from the Africa Mercy ship. Now a healthy teenager, Niki is on her own mission to help others like her. Marcia Dixon reports

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06/08/2011 08:35 AM



Image Text:

RESCUED: Niki as a baby with her adoptive parents Suzanne and Peter Tucker Abadjan December 1991

IF IT were not for the heroic act of a medical doctor nearly twenty years ago, Niki Tucker, would be another African child who would have died or been abandoned at birth due to poverty.

This however, was not her fate. Niki was rescued by Dr Keith Thomson, a volunteer on Mercy Ships, a floating hospital that provides medical care to people in the world's poorest countries.

The ship was moored in Abidjan, Ivory Coast and Dr Thomson, along with Suzanne and Peter Tucker, a Christian couple from Canada had travelled to a nearby island for a church meeting. There they met a local midwife holding a healthy baby and a sick one, Niki.

Moved by compassion, Dr Thomson took Niki back to the ship, even though he wasn't supposed to, so she could receive proper health care. She was adopted by the Tuckers, and spent two months sleeping in a shoebox while being nursed back to health.

Now a young adult, Niki got an opportunity to give something back to the charity that saved her life by serving as a volunteer on an Africa Mercy Ship which was moored in Sierra Leone

in March this year. She said “Being on the Africa Mercy Ship drastically changed my appreciation and view of the world around me, and how blessed I am.”



HOPE-FILLED FUTURE: Niki as she is today with Dr Keith Thomson and her mother Suzanne on board an Africa Mercy ship

She visited patients on the ship, attended worship services and played with the children as well as reconnecting with her African heritage. “I may have been born in Africa, but Canada has always been my home. After returning to Africa, it feels like I have found my second home.”

The teenager also met Dr Thomson again, the man who saved her life. “When I first met him in 2003 I was very nervous and didn’t know quite what to expect. Meeting him opened my eyes to how amazing and special my story is, especially after our trip to Sierra Leone with Mercy Ships this past March, with my mom Suzanne, Dr. Keith and his wife Fiona.”

Niki says she is grateful for her life in Canada with her parents, two younger brothers and best friend Ashley who she views as a sister. And she suffers very little angst about her entry into the world. “I have always known I was adopted and all I’ve ever felt is love and family. Nothing else was ever an issue in regards to having been left by my biological mother in the dark night. Suzanne Tucker is my mom and always has been from day one.”

A committed Christian, Niki has her ups and downs, like all teenagers do, and recognises God is still working on her. She is passionate about baking and plans to do a vocational course on the subject. She also has aspirations to help children who need loving homes. “I would love to help other children find wonderful loving forever homes as an adoption counselor because of the impact it has had on my own life. I also hope to open my own foundation helping teenage girls and women who have been, or are struggling with, the aftermath of sexual abuse.”

And her big plans for the future don’t end there. She hopes to get married to a man that meets her list of 42 criteria, have four or five children and volunteer again with Mercy Ships, charity to which she owes her life.