

FREYA'S INTERVIEW OF MR PER HALL, BEFORE HIS TRIP TO ETHIOPIA WITH 'OPERATION SMILE'

Where are you going?

Where am I going? Well, I am going to Ethiopia which is in Africa. To be honest, I had to look it up myself exactly where it was. It's on the right hand side of Africa and it's a country which has got quite a reputation for being a poor country because they have very little food, mainly because it doesn't rain very much in Ethiopia. There are lot and lots of people who live there with very little to live on.

Who are you taking with you?

I am going with a group of people rather than taking people. I am going with a charity called Operation Smile which is an American charity which has for some years now sent teams of surgeons and nurses and doctors and all sorts of people that you need to look after people who have been born with cleft lip and palate. They collect quite a lot of money from well wishing people from around the world and they have enough money now to send quite a few of these trips to lots of countries in the world. There are probably about 30-40 places that they regularly visit and Ethiopia is just one of them.

How long is the flight?

It is going to take about 8 hours to get to the capital of Ethiopia which is called Addis Ababa and then we are going to take another plane from there the next day to a city called Jimma. That is where we are going to do the work.

How long will you stay there?

We are going to stay there for about 8 days and what we are going to do on the first two days is that we are going to see all the people that hope that we might be able to do some surgery for them but we won't be able to operate on everyone so we might spend the first two days just choosing the people that we can operate on and sending other people away which is a bit of shame but we can't do everything. There are going to be six surgeons there and we are going to do what we can in the remaining five days and we are going to be operating probably from 8.00 until 8.00 at night. Everyone there is so well co-ordinated they will already have a team in place to advertise that we are coming and they have got a good communication system established as teams have been going there for several years now so these groups of people come but unfortunately, because we haven't got enough time to operate on everyone we will only be able to operate on the people that probably have never had an operation.

Will you work every day?

I will work every day except one day when we are going to go off as a team and see some of the countryside and have a day off and get to know some of the people there.

Have you been there before?

No I have never been there before. I have never been to Africa before. I have been to another country, Sri Lanka, and did some surgery about three years ago so that was my first experience of doing this type of thing but this one is going to be quite a lot bigger and probably quite a lot harder work and I think we will all feel a little bit different about Christmas when we get back..

Will you only get to treat children?

I might treat some adult. I think that sometimes there are people, hard to believe, who are in their 20's, 30's, 40's and 50's who have never had an operation on their lip, and who have never had the chance to have it and who might come along and actually stay awake and have it done under local anaesthetic. We can give them injections like you have at the dentist so you might have people who can walk in, just lie down and stay awake for an hour while I change the shape of their face and make them look different.

Are you just treating people who are less fortunate?

Definitely. There are people who have need of this because they have never had an operation so I think they are much less fortunate. Ethiopia is a country where there isn't a proper cleft lip and palate surgery service and yet the population of Ethiopia, if you were to look it up, I think is about 79 million and I think the population in the UK is about 65 million. So they will have as many babies born there or a bit more than we are used to seeing here but no-one is operating on them and in the UK there about 1000 babies a year born in the UK so there is quite a large workload. The other thing that we are planning to do is to try and teach the local doctors how to do the surgery and support them so that maybe in 3-4 years time they are will be doing it largely on their own so that will be helping them a bit rather than people having to go there to do the surgery so that's why I am interested in going as I like it and, if it works out, I would hope to go back every year and maybe other members of the team might go. Perhaps Tariq might go. We might keep supporting that one place. That's my main interest – whether we can help them get started and support them thereafter.

Is it on a Boat?

No it's not a boat. You're thinking of the nursing ships. We are operating in a university hospital. There are two charities, Operation Smile which is the one I am going with and Smile Train. Operation Smile have talked about purchasing and supplying a dedicated plastic surgery ward for this hospital so that we can establish a link up in that area where we will be able to go regularly.

Will you go back to check up on them?

I won't go back to check up on them but they will leave a team behind for a week to check that there are aren't any problems. What would be perfect is if we could end up with a system where they do come back to checked like we do here. They may get checked if they turn up at the next mission and long term I would hope that we could develop a system where they do have the opportunity to come back and be checked as one operation can make a big difference but there may be other operations that can make a bigger difference. We are expecting 1000 people to turn up on the first day and we have to pick probably about 200 that we have time to operate on.

Will it be mainly lips rather than palate?

There will be very few palates to repair as it is difficult to survive with an unrepaired cleft palate.

My wife is going as a volunteer photographer and she is taking pictures for Operation Smile to document things but we are also going to take our own pictures so we will have some pictures to bring home to show everyone.

Will you take your own operating tools with you?

I am taking one special favourite instrument. I am also going to take my headlight that I wear so I am being a bit a cheat. Really I should use what's there.

Can we pass second hand kit on to them?

I will keep my eye out, and yes, if there is equipment that may make a big difference then we could try fundraise for that.

Why did you decide to go to Ethiopia when there are loads of other poor countries around?

Mainly because I have a friend who has been there before and I was talking to him about what they were doing there, and particularly because they want to train the local surgeons. That is exactly what I want to do. If you search on your computer on Operation Smile UK and follow the website it will show you all sorts of things.