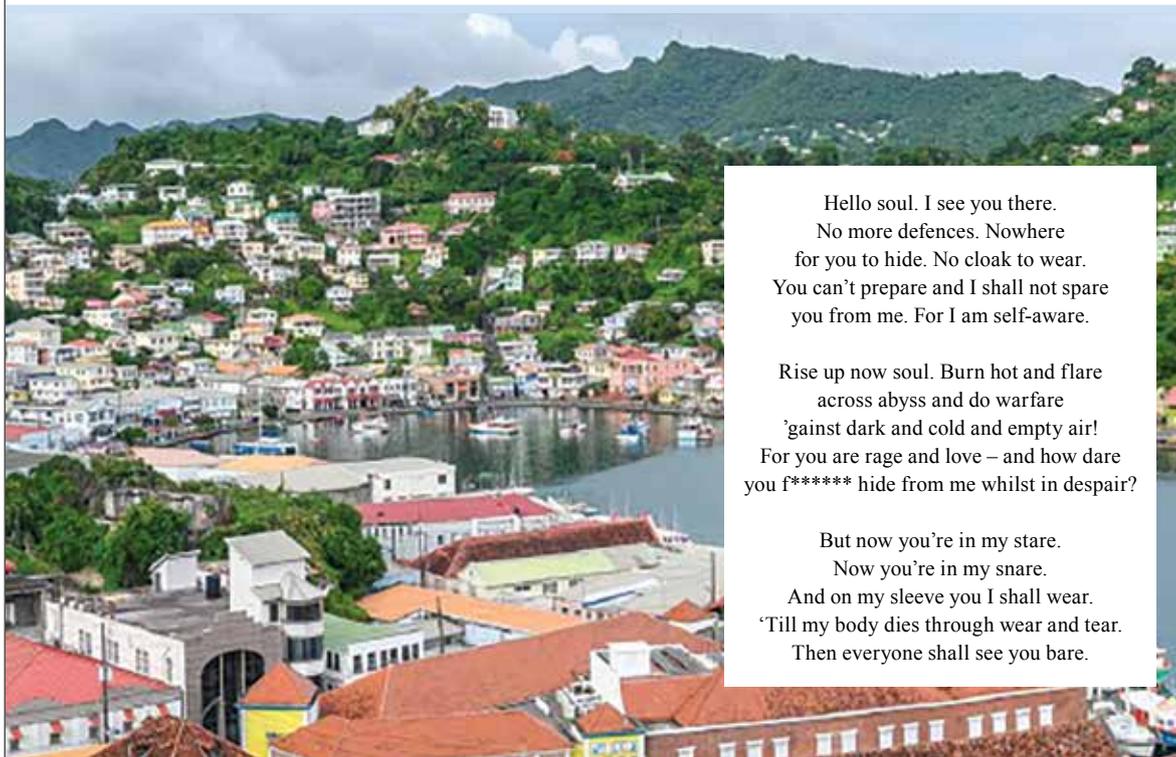


# A love affair: DMC's 2019 Grenada dental mission trip

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Hello soul. I see you there.  
No more defences. Nowhere  
for you to hide. No cloak to wear.  
You can't prepare and I shall not spare  
you from me. For I am self-aware.

Rise up now soul. Burn hot and flare  
across abyss and do warfare  
'gainst dark and cold and empty air!  
For you are rage and love – and how dare  
you f\*\*\*\*\* hide from me whilst in despair?

But now you're in my stare.  
Now you're in my snare.  
And on my sleeve you I shall wear.  
'Till my body dies through wear and tear.  
Then everyone shall see you bare.

And there you have it. I just started my article about our 2019 Caribbean Dental Outreach Program with a poem. A poem I wrote after volunteering for 16 days in Grenada (August 10-26, 2019) in partnership with the Sandals Foundation (which provides us with free accommodations, meals, transportation, and various resort amenities) and Great Shape! Inc. (a U.S. based not-for-profit organization that helps set up and run our dental clinics on the ground).

Is the poem not making sense? OK. Let me explain. You see, a few months before heading down to Grenada, I just wasn't feeling it. I was in a deep funk. Was it a mid-life crisis? Don't know. Never had one before. Was I depressed? No. Just not motivated to do much of anything. Hard to admit. I gained some weight. And I felt like I was just going through the motions but not really doing much else.

I knew I needed to snap out of it and become



[Photos courtesy of Dr. Ming Yau].

the next iteration of myself. Better, stronger, faster, happier. But I couldn't get there on my own for some reason. My wife, Parastou, knew something was up. She told me to go see my acting coach (a life coach of sorts). And he told me to appreciate how good I've got it. His words helped, but not enough. I knew what I needed: to see how others lived happy lives with far less materialistic things.

And so I went down to Grenada to help run our annual dental mission trip (my 5th year doing so). And what I experienced down in Grenada



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**Grenada Week 1 Team** included Canadians Dr. Marina Polonsky, Dr. Monika Krolczyk, Philip Krolczyk, Marcel Krolczyk, Dr. Dagmar Justa, Dr. Maria Tuason, Dr. Ming Yau, Dr. Margaret Plewik, Caroline Plewik, and DMC's Michael Carabash [photo courtesy of Dr. Ming Yau].



**Grenada Week 2 Team** included 44 4<sup>th</sup> Year U of T Dental Students, Dr. Daniel Biner, Dr. Barry Biner, Dr. Steven Biner, Dr. Samir Barsoum, Dr. Fadi Swaida, Dr. Ajay Gupta, dental accountant Atul Mehra, Henry Schein reps Naghmeh Hafezi and Cherry Chen-Egan, and DMC's Michael Carabash and Charmain Menage, as well as Johnny Jaswal [photo courtesy of Dr. Ming Yau].



Dr. Maria Tuason, Dr. Dagmar Justa and Michael Carabash "playing" **Jab-Jab** (annual Carnival day street party) in the very early morning hours.



After resting (but not really) from "playing" **Jab-Jab**, volunteers attended "**Monday Night Mass**" ("Mass" referring to "Massive amount of people", not "Church service"). It was the battle of the bands (huge trucks blaring Soca Music over loud speakers in procession), and the **Carib** (their local beer) band was our favourite to win! [photos courtesy of Dr. Ming Yau].



Love for making new friends. Dr. Monika Krolczyk with a patient and Michael Carabash.



Dr. Marina Polonsky with her favourite patient of the week.



Dr. Samir Barsoum at the Sandals beach at 5:30 a.m. almost every morning. But he was ONLY able to catch fish after I left. Apparently, I'm a "fish cooler" [photo courtesy of Michael Carabash].

changed me. Brought me back but also pushed me forward. I lost the weight and even got back into writing poetry again (hence the above), which I haven't done for a very long time. I re-discovered an old attitude I used to have towards life: adventurous, devilish, and selfish (in the good way). Perhaps most importantly, I became aware and appreciative of how good I really have it.

So how did that happen?

Well, at the most superficial level, we just took a bunch of strangers (more specifically: Canadian dentists and hygienists, U of T dental students, Oregon dental hygiene students, and Canadian and U.S. supervisors and support staff) out into the middle of nowhere in a country most had never been to and had them

create a fully functional dental clinic from scratch to see impoverished patients for a week. No biggie, right?

Oh yeah, and just for s\*\*\*\* and giggles, our clinics would routinely experience "issues" like equipment failing, having no running water for a day or two, or no electricity for our compressors, not being able to sterilize equipment fast enough, almost daily sharps exposures, having too many patients or not enough, trying to find out where all of the polishing burs went (D-A-G-M-A-R!), etc.

But beneath the surface, while resolving "issues" and treating patients, something magical happened: we found love. Not physical love, but more soul satisfying. Sounds corny. But that's the truth.

**Love for helping others.** Love for see-

ing long lines of people waiting hours in the hot sun for just a chance (no guarantee) to see a dentist or hygienist that week. Love for patients who had so little but who gave so much gratitude in the form of smiles, hugs, high fives, thumbs

And if you're interested in knowing what we accomplished,

**HERE ARE OUR STATS:**

	<b>Group 1 Week 1</b>	<b>Group 2 Week 2</b>
Patients Treated	449	623
Cleanings	304	156
Extractions	85	315
Fillings	90	237



Love for bribing a young boy with USD \$5 to allow **Dr. Maria Tuason** (pictured left here) to do two badly needed extractions on him (guess what? It worked! His mom said he was going to use it to buy a soccer ball) [photo courtesy of Michael Carabash].



Love for everyone at the National Stadium Clinic [Photo courtesy of Michael Carabash].



Love for Dr. Daniel Biner.

up, and bringing us local food and fruit.

**Love for experiencing a different culture**, vibrant and even devilish at times. Like during their annual **Jab Jab** festival, which saw our volunteers covered in paint and oil, drinking beer, and dancing alongside TENS OF THOUSANDS of local Grenadians to Soca music at 5 a.m. while locals ‘politely’ grinded our female volunteers from behind (honestly, none of our volunteers complained).

**Love for working within a team towards a common goal**, where you can actually ask another dentist for help treating a patient and they’re happy to offer it. Love for avoiding drama and being solutions-oriented.

**Love for making new friends.** Dr. Monika Krolczyk with a patient and Michael Carabash. Here’s what Dr. Krolczyk had to say about the experience: “At first, I had serious doubts. How could I leave my office and go to a country I’ve never visited before with a bunch of strangers for a week? But when you’re down there, you soon realize that you’re part of a team that wants to help others. On the bus to the clinic, you see the country, sing songs and tell jokes. At the clinic, everyone is charged with energy. Dentists help each other out. No attitudes or drama. Patients – far less fortunate than us – are so happy and thankful for us being there. Back at the resort, we are eating, drinking, swimming and dancing into the night. And then it hits: I am not alone. I have new

friends and I love my Grenadian patients! I am so lucky to have been part of this experience!” [photo courtesy of Michael Carabash]

**Love for just going with it** (“You Gotta Roll With the Punches” says Great Shape! Inc.’s Executive Director, Joseph Wright aka “Papa Joe”). Like when **Dr. Marina Polonsky** – one of Canada’s foremost laser dentistry experts – was forced to extract teeth with sub-par tools and without loops or lights (her luggage got held up); was forced to use “ridiculously humungous” 25 gauge long needles to anesthetize patients (something she hasn’t done in a long time because of her experience with lasers); was forced to sit for hours on an uncomfortable stool with fans blowing hot air on her. Out of her element, and unable to do anything about it, she felt frustrated by the quality of her work and how long it took to get things done. Then she did what she normally does – told her next nervous patient who needed two extractions to “relax and go to your happy place”. His response took Dr. Polonsky aback: “OK I’m going to think about you,” he said flirtatiously, with a big grin. Dr. Polonsky stopped, looked back at him, chuckled and smiled. Her attitude instantly changed: “OK, I’m going to relax now, stop worrying, and have fun with this”, she told herself. No matter what happens, it’s all going to work out just fine. Some dental care is better than none. So, just roll with

the punches [photo courtesy of Michael Carabash].

**Love for socially responsible and generous dental supply companies** like Henry Schein and others (e.g. Frontier Dental, Maxill, Colgate, Patterson, and K-Dental) who donated what we needed to run the program. And many thanks to Henry Schein Toronto Branch for sending us two (2) perfect volunteers (Naghmeh Hafezi and Cherry Chen-Egan) who kept our 20-op clinic at the National Stadium organized and pumping on all cylinders, with help from DMC’s Charmain Menage and Johnny Jaswal, as well as dental accountant Atul Mehra of M&Co.

**Love for everyone at the National Stadium Clinic working so hard that we were able to see no less than ALL of the children from the local orphanage** – despite having NO capacity to see any of them because we were already full when they showed up! Here are some of the orphans with the Orphanage’s Director (middle pic) (wearing the green shirt) at the registration table, along with Charmain Menage (middle, back), Cherry Chen-Egan (right back) and Naghmeh Hafezi (far right back).

**Love for Dr. Yasaman Garakani, Dr. Ming Yau, and Dr. Maria Tuason** – who all purchased and donated two (2) brand new cavitrans EACH for our program and which were all put to good use during the trip!



Love for our patients, who cooked us "Oil Down", Grenada's national dish - a coconut milk-based stew made up of chicken, pig tail, fish, callaloo, bread fruit, carrots and other tasty ingredients, plus a dough dumpling (which I'm not a big fan of). P.S. this pic was taken by U of T student Tracy Tang, who along with other classmates, cooked Oil Down when they returned home to Toronto. Yum! [photo courtesy of Tracy Tang].



More love for our patients, who brought us local fresh fruits like Soursop, Guava, Cashew, Starfruit, Skinnups, Mangoes, and even Sugar Cane and fresh Banana Bread! Mmmmm.... Yummy! We even thought about changing our promotional flyers to say "**Free Fruit For Dentistry**" [photo courtesy of Michael Carabash].



There's nothing sweeter than drinking Grenadian beer (Carib or Stag) on the way home from clinic after a very long, hot and sweaty day of work. This is what our food and beverage cooler looked like at the end of our last day at the National Stadium clinic [photo courtesy of Naghmeh Hafezi].



We wiggled a blocked car out of our way - crazy fun! [photo courtesy of Dr. Ming Yau].

**Khosraviani started singing and dancing to “Tombstone”** to calm down a nervous patient... and it worked! P.P.S., another EPIC moment happened at the end of Week 2 when ALL the volunteers congo-lined out of our clinic and into the middle of the National Stadium and then danced in unison to **“Tombstone”**. Not gonna forget that sight anytime soon.

**Love for dancing** non-stop (seriously, non-stop) into the wee hours of the night to any and all sorts of music and without needing any liquid encouragement to do it (I’m talking about you, **Dr. Monika Krolczyk and Dr. Margaret Plewik!**).

Here, volunteers literally wiggled a blocked car out of our bus’ way heading back to the Sandals resort. It took 8 volunteers, with police supervision, to do it and it felt awesome. We wanted to keep doing it after that experience and actively looked and prayed for more cars (and even buses) to “wiggle”!

**Love for the thrill of jumping off a high ledge** and into fresh waters below while your teammates cheer you on (I’m talking to you, **Dr. Ming Yau!**).

Love for **Dr. Daniel Biner**, who poured himself into this program for nine months leading up to Week 2 volunteers going down. He wanted to help ensure that the 44 U of T Dental students which he supervised at U of T and encouraged to come down had the best possible experience. And they absolutely did – because of him! And love for **Daniel Biner** for making us all laugh every now and then with his crazy antics (including pouring a bucket of ice water on yours truly on the last day; but I got my revenge by booking us a couples’ massage – his first ever!).

Love for sitting on a pier at night with fellow teammates, looking up at the stars, and listening / singing along to classics like **Phil Collins’** “In the Air Tonight”,

and “It’s Just Another Day In Paradise” or **Pink Floyd’s** “Wish You Were Here”, **John Legend’s** “All of Me”, or **Green Day’s** “Time of Your Life”.

Love. Just love. Ego-less love. Leading the way.

And all of that changes people. Makes you really cherish how good you’ve got it.

So whenever someone asks me how I’m doing nowadays, I reply: “Best Day of My Life!”. An awkward pause follows. “Really?”, they ask sarcastically. “Yes”, I reply, “I’m still here.” Their expression changes. They get it. Our time here is precious. Many more billions of us have come and gone than are presently here. So each day we’re here is truly another gift. And I appreciate it more than ever.

So if you’re wanting or needing to become the next iteration of your better self, consider coming down to Grenada, Jamaica or Turks & Caicos with me next year! In doing so, you will significantly change the lives of others and yours too.

P.S. you read my first poem (in the intro). It’s only fitting that I finish this article with the second poem I wrote after coming home:

Two souls kiss, but our lips never meet.  
Each sees the other, but our worlds retreat.  
My stomach is full, but I never did eat.  
My cold clammy hands now bursting with heat.

The breaths I take in of you are so sweet  
it shocks my system to obsolete:  
muscles just meat; bones like concrete.  
I can’t feel my feet or get up from this seat.

So embracing defeat, I breathe and repeat.  
Time tells deceit. Music loses its beat.  
And emotions and thoughts take a backseat  
to this moment, this memory – that I’ll  
never delete

‘cause my soul kissed yours,  
and there’s no f\*\*\*\*\* neat  
way to describe this!  
No. “Love” would mistreat  
this miracle, spectacle, impossible feat  
of two souls kissing. Two halves now complete.

Thank you, Grenada. 🎵 See Me a Gone. See Me a Gone. See Me a Gone! I’m Up in the Band! 🎵 Back soon! 📺