

EXPERIENCES AND INSIGHTS OF INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERS

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Note: We invite you to read the following writings that have come from many different individual volunteers. We hope that these excerpts will help you get an insight into their experiences, and will be an inspiration for you.

- Walt and Betty Whitehurst (Consultants for Individual Volunteers, 1999-2004)

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Financial Support

Philippines

My visa expires in August, but I may try to get it extended a bit longer - maybe a month or two, maybe longer... I'm totally amazed that my church has continued to send donations to me (about \$750 since I arrived), so I may be able to afford a little longer mission service (here or elsewhere). They have shown incredible generosity toward me.

Travel

Bosnia

When I took my ticket to the airline counter, the agent asked I was traveling alone. When I said yes, he asked, "Do you have relatives there you will stay with?"

"No, I'm going to work as a volunteer with the United Methodist Committee on Relief."

He said, "I don't think you should do that, young lady. I want you to go over there and sit down and think about this before you go. It is very dangerous for you to be there alone."

After praying to God to give me direction, I decided to call some people to ask for their advice. If any of them said it was not a good idea for me to go, I would cancel my trip. I called about 20 people, and none of them were at home. Finally, I went back to the ticket counter and told the man I was going. He said, "Well, all right, then. But I'm going to put you in first class."

In Switzerland, where I had to change planes, I went to the ladies' restroom and saw one of my

former English as a Second Language students. She and her mother and sister were on their way to Bosnia to visit relatives there. They took me into their family group for the rest of the trip, so I didn't have to travel alone after all.

Nepal

This month I climbed for five hours, 20 minutes straight up a mountain to a mission hospital. We had driven for five hours to the base of the mountain in a jeep. My expat friends were taking bets that I'd have to be carried part of the way or take 10 hours as did the last woman of only 48 years of age. [The volunteer who wrote this is 65.] In contrast, my Nepali friends sought another way to handle my risk-taking. They actually prayed that I would not fall off the mountain. Even a Hindu friend told me, "Aamaa, I did what I think you Christians call 'pray'."

All supplies for the hospital or anything else must be carried the same route up. Sick and injured people in hammocks slung over the shoulders of 2-4 men and/or women arrive each day. This is the local "ambulance." Some have been carried for days. When traffic seems bad on your local expressway or you must pause to let an ambulance pass, silently say a prayer for the Nepali who is seriously ill or has a broken bone and is being jostled up the mountain to a hospital.

A 58-year-old woman from England and I returned down the mountain on foot where we met the local bus and rode for two of the five hours back to Kathmandu on top of the bus - no rails - in the winter wind. The first hour we were joined "cozily" by 30 Nepali men on top and 60+ people inside the bus.

Nepal

There is a whole system of little three-wheeled vehicles that run along with the buses, the tuk tuks. They are supposed to hold 12 people in a space smaller than a minivan, almost half that size. Well what to do when a big foreigner gets in one!! [The volunteer who wrote this is a small North American woman.] I had to learn to duck, the first time I took one I bumped my head hard on the roof going in and out. One day I wanted to take one to language class. Well, I got on, found a seat and sat down beside a Nepali man... Of course, my legs are a good two inches longer and four inches rounder than all the Nepali men's legs are. There is always a young boy who rides the back step, collecting money and signaling to the driver with a fist bang on the side when it is time to go or stop. He started yelling "didi" (older sister) to me and motioning for me to move over. He put another man in a space that was five inches wide. I was tempted to ask the guy if he wanted to sit on my lap but since it is not acceptable to look a man in the eye, let alone talk to them, I thought I better not. Soon it was my stop and I banged on the roof to signal the driver I wanted out. Then I crawled out over 10 sets of knees through a non-existent space. What an adventure.

Vietnam

At some airports, passengers deem it necessary to orderly queue-up; here they orderly half-circle with fellow passengers ahead and behind, to the left and right... So, I'm almost to the point where I'll be funneled through to the customs agent. The guy to my left looks like he's ready to jostle into my position. He also looks surly. So I, not wanting an international incident, gesture him ahead of me with the sweep of my hand. No, No, No, he insists smiling, and says he was on the same JFK flight, lives in Philadelphia, and has come home to visit his family. He's just tired. Like me...

I exit customs and am "greeted" by a throng of people -- hundreds of them. I now am undaunted. My new friend points to his family, all jumping up, waving, smiling at him. And me. Then I see a hand raise above the throng, holding a piece of paperboard with my name written in BIG, BOLD letters. Another friend welcomes me to Vietnam. Doan Quoc Viet is his name. He has come with a Land Cruiser and driver to bring me to Can Tho...

Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City: Take 1/3 of the people out of New York skyscrapers, put 2/3 on bicycles, the rest on Hondas; sprinkle with cars, leaded gas trucks and busses. This is Saigon traffic. Pity the pedestrian.

Ho Chi Minh City to Can Tho: Four hour drive down Highway 1. An impossible number of shades of green... Every square meter under cultivation or fish farmed... Flowering trees, bougainvillea, bananas. We stop for lunch. Rice, steamed veggies, banana for dessert. I hold up the banana and ask Viet, "what do you call this in Vietnamese?" He says, "banana" and smiles. I smile too...

One afternoon Sofia and I took a short, three-hour cruise on several small Mekong Delta canals. For the boat, picture this: about five meters long, less than one and a half wide, cigar-shaped, blunted at the stern, the bow rounded and protected with an old tire and rising above water level. Two means of power, motor and manual oars, or to be precise, woman-ual. I know, I know, manual means by hand. But I can't help myself and the skipper was a she. For the motor part, picture this: take a five-meter long weed whacker, replace the string part with a propeller, and you got it. Extended from the motor end was a 40 cm U-shaped handle. During tight maneuvers control of the motor was mostly by foot while the hands steered with the oars.

Bolivia

Cobija (where we spent last week) is a buzzing community - both literally (motorcycles) and figuratively (the capital of the Pando District and full of people who are eager to improve their community). Surrounded on three sides by the Acre River and Brazil, it is incredibly isolated. Planes fly in from (and out to) La Paz only on Tuesdays and Fridays. Our Friday flight was rescheduled for early Saturday morning. The following Tuesday flight was canceled. The bus station indicates all trips are canceled until further notice (rainy season makes dirt roads impassable). Even when busses run, it is a steady 58-60 hour trip from Cobija to La Paz.

Bolivia

Nov. 6 - The retreat with the church went well... The delegates from the church in Caranavi arrived late Thursday night...The next morning we crammed into the pickup truck and set off for Nuevos Horizontes (a small town between the Colegio and Rurre). We were 16 women, 3 babies, 2 pastors, plus all the food and baggage for the weekend in the bed of the pickup truck. It was packing on a whole new level!

Feb. 14 - In my last e-mail, I was still in Trinidad waiting for a bus to San Borja. How bad could it be? Well, I learned the Bolivians aren't joking around when they say that the roads are impassable. I found the only pickup truck making the trip and a couple of hours into the journey realized what I had gotten myself into. A ten-hour trip ended up lasting three days. I have never seen so much mud in my life! We stripped off our boots (there was really no point), and waded around in mud up to my thighs. There were over 10 people making the trip, so the weight didn't help... It wasn't all bad though. We spent a great night in San Ignacio de Moros, a beautiful little town... Also, the driver was extremely optimistic and kept everyone's spirits up.

April 16 - Since it was Holy Week, we only had classes until Thursday... Since we still had to get the Chimanes' land documents signed, Erasmo and I decided to use Friday to enter a community called Aguas Negras. Neither of us had ever been there but we figured it couldn't be that far. We were wrong! We left at 9:00 on our bikes and finally arrived at 1:00 in the afternoon. The last part didn't even allow bikes so we left them on the path and continued on foot. We had two liters of pineapple soda and six pieces of bread for the journey. About halfway in we stopped and visited with a colona. She lives with her husband and a son and her closest neighbor is an hour away. It takes her two hours to walk to Kilometer 31 and since she doesn't know how to ride a bike, she hardly ever makes the trip. And I thought I was isolated!

Importance of Learning the Language

Bolivia

The biggest adjustment is the language! I have already improved tremendously with my Spanish although it's going to be a long haul.

Bolivia

August 1 - I've also been spending time studying Aymara. All of the professors here come from the Altiplano (the mountains) where they speak Aymara or Quechua. They get a kick out of me, a gringa, speaking Aymara. So far, I can ask someone their name, say my name, count to ten, and list the body parts. It's fun, and Angel (the director) loves to teach me.

May 11 - I'm trying to learn the basics of Chimane before I leave... I picked up bilingual materials from the New Tribes Mission. I've learned some basic sentences but the pronunciation is difficult... I often visit the Chimane to practice and they are helpful but also laugh at me quite a bit.

Bolivia

You were right - my greatest wish so far is that I might know more Spanish... Though limited, my basic knowledge of Spanish has been a great help... I will continue to work on my Spanish, because it will make my work easier and it will make my stay much more enjoyable. To have come to Bolivia without knowing any Spanish would have been a disaster.

Bolivia

We knew before we came that few people in Bolivia speak English, so we began studying Spanish last summer - first with a tutor, then in classes at the technical college... We continue to spend an hour or two each day studying Spanish here, but we make progress slowly. The most difficult task for us is understanding sermons and large group discussions. In more personal conversations, one can ask questions and use gestures until we understand. With the help of our pocket dictionaries, we are able to shop and get photocopies made... We can get around in cabs and on buses... We will continue our study of Spanish when we return home... We want to be able to have "real conversations" on future trips... We had not realized how important the relationship between teacher and students is and how difficult it is to establish that relationship through an interpreter, especially if that interpreter editorializes and even gets into her own debates with the students.

Honduras

My time here has definitely been different from my experience last year, largely because of my increased ability to communicate.

Cultural Sensitivity

Philippines

Immediately got a haircut. I showed up here with pretty long hair and I could tell it made a poor impression, so on day two I cut it.

Cross-Cultural Communication

South Africa

We had a jumble sale (bazaar/garage sale) on Thursday. We basically sold clothes to some of the poor people in the city, for very low cost. Maria and I were manning the sale. One time, when the crowd inside started to die down, she got three items of clothing on the table and said to me, "I'll be right back." I thought she was going on break or to get some food. She walks out onto the street and yells loudly (and she's African, mind you), "Five Bup, Five Bup, Five Bup" and holds out the clothes and claps her hands. This is a common thing for African people here to do to get people to come into their stores. "Five Bup" means "50 cents." And, a whole crowd just rushed into the place. We sold quite a bit then. After about 30 minutes, it started to die down again. So, she went out again, saying "Five Bup, Five Bup, Five Bup," and more people came in again. So, then she left on break. And the crowd started to die down. So I went out with a sweater and a skirt in my hand and said, "Five Bup, Five Bup, Five Bup," clapping my hands. Some of the African men stood still in wonder (it's rare to see white people here speaking an African language, or doing African things, especially those with American accents.) Nevertheless a lot of people flooded the place. And after it died down, I did it again.

India

This past weekend, I took part in a Student Leadership Retreat. We took 43 students down into a Christian Retreat Center in Dehra Dun (about 21 miles DOWN the mountain - the bus trip down and up was an adventure in itself)... I and another fellow took 14 students to the Shady Side School. That was all I knew until I got to the front gate, which read: SHADY SIDE SCHOOL FOR BLIND GIRLS. A fascinating and moving experience. One of the important factors to understand is the role of females in most of Indian society. The birth of a female is not always celebrated. As the director told me, most of these girls would have been abandoned, if even permitted to live, if not for this institution. Here they will be taught how to read Braille and skills to survive in the larger world. At first our students were very hesitant. I remember especially one young girl from Australia who was just standing around after most of the others had gone off with some of the blind children. I went over to her and asked what made her feel most uncomfortable - the cultural differences or their blindness. She said, "I don't speak Hindi, so what can I say or do that would mean anything?" In the meantime, there was a blind girl just standing by herself looking very lost. I encouraged the Aussie to try. Reluctantly she approached the blind girl and took her hand. The smile on the face of the blind girl, just by the human touch, I will never forget. Language became not necessary for these two girls. I did get one of our Hindi-speaking girls to come and translate between the two girls for a few minutes. By the end of our stay, these twos freighted humans, who could not verbally communicate, had forged a meaningful relationship. God's grace was there.

Nepal

Ke game. (What to do? For those of you who are new to Notes from Nepal - it is a favorite Nepali phrase used for all the things that don't go according to plan here.)

Cultural Adaptation

India

The Indian culture continues to fascinate me. The expectations, work ethic, and status, for example, are so different from the West... Water and electricity are prime examples. You can't drink or even brush your teeth in the tap water - if you have any on a particular day. It must be highly filtered and/or boiled before use... The electricity often goes out... No electricity equals candles. Overall, the food here continues to be excellent.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

In spite of the uncertainty of life here in Congo, I am planning to open the curtain on a one-act play in mid-June. My 7th-9th graders have proven to be quite the gifted actors, so I'm seeing just what they're capable of. The challenge for me will be finding times for set-building, extra rehearsals, and the like. Two of my students are Indian Muslims, so they pray five times a day and go to the mosque almost every evening. Another pair are Argentinean Seventh-Day Adventists, which means that you can't even go to talk to them between sundown Friday and sundown Saturday. And the last student, an American, is more or less southern Baptist, which means we can't do much on Sundays. Thursday and Saturday evenings seem to be about the only times we can all meet together after school. So we'll see how it turns out.

France

Never washed so many dishes, made so many beds, fed so many people in my life! Mopping, sweeping, everything. Not the most glamorous of jobs, but I've learned to find joy in being a servant of Christ in a new way. Amazing!

Bolivia

Our school is about 20 hours by bus from La Paz. The school is not actually in a city at all. Or even a little village. If you have a map of Bolivia, look slightly northeast of La Paz into the Beni province. This is where the beginning of the Amazon jungle starts that goes on into Brasil. Our school is on the one road that leads up through Brasil to the jungle. It is in between two small "towns": Rurranabaque and Yucumo. Both of these towns have an office where you can make phone calls and they sometimes have electricity. But anything you would NEED to buy you can find there. Like me, you will probably find that your NEEDS change as you grow accustomed to the way of life there.

Nepal

I have settled in my own apartment in Patan, across the Bagmati River from Kathmandu. My home is nicer than I expected although as it is now winter here and about 35-45 degrees at night, I miss central heating. Layering is the dress of the season, all the turtle-necks and polartec I brought...

My Nepali colleagues patiently put up with all my questions and the strange ways of the

bedishas (foreigners). I find the Nepali people to be warm and gracious with great senses of humor and fun. They like to celebrate - lots of holidays and festivals. They love color and the more colors and patterns one can wear the better. They are very curious. This is a country where most people bathe at the public tap and live in very crowded homes so privacy doesn't exist as we know it.

(Later)

I am settled into my apartment in Tansen... This morning I woke up at 5 a.m. to the sound of hard rain that just became louder as I listened. I think it is safe to say monsoon is officially here. In the bedroom, I have one small window that has a screen, bars, and wooden shutters on the inside so when it is raining I have to close the shutters to avoid a bed bath of rainwater. I have set a small table in the living room to work where I have two windows, also with no glass. But as they face southwest, they don't get rain except in the heaviest storms, so usually I can let the shutters open and get light. The room is probably 8 x 12 so it is full. I live mostly in the living room; it is fine for a single person.

I went to 7:30 a.m. mass with Sr. Pat and Sr. Bernie (Maryknolls). Sr. Pat is vice principal at the nursing school. They go to the service connected to the local elementary school where there are four sisters and a father (priest). This morning there were 14 of us, the biggest crowd they have had, and so they were pleased that their numbers are growing. After service, of course they fed us breakfast, chickpea tarkari (vegetable stew) and big fluffy pancakes that reminded me of Ethiopian bread. The debate on the way home was whether we also had tea or coffee. It was very hard to tell, they said it was coffee but mostly it was milk and sugar. (Just for your information, I have bitten the bullet and told Didi that I will drink biscie milk (buffalo milk) this time, she is pleased as Nepalis think it is so much better than powdered milk. So she gets me some fresh and then boils it to pasteurize it for me. One thing for sure, it has a healthy or unhealthy amount of cream. And the cream is very thick and clingy just like biscie fat.)

Vietnam

Hot begins my Vietnam story. Not Africa hot, as I used to think the gauge. Surface of Venus hot is closer to the mark. Humid too. As humid as it can get. I like it.

(Later)

The sun does not set here, it plops like a frog into a pond. Some of you should forgive my pedantic antics because the vote so far is positive.

Honduras

I am living with my teacher and his family. I am fortunate that I have a private room with a bath. However, do not think that I am living in luxury. The home I live in is like one, albeit larger, you see in the poorest sections of Houston...

All of you would be aghast at my living conditions and I know some of you would refuse to eat a meal here or lay your head down at night. I, too, was wary and cautious my first few days here. After a few days of cautious living I decided that, quite possibly, living humbly was a lesson I needed to learn.

I am not saying my family lives in filth. They take pride in what they have. I suppose one way of describing it is that bugs, all kinds of bugs, come with the territory here. Bugs are now my dinner

companions at the dinner table. tiny insects, big insects, HUGE ANTS (but no cucarachas).

I am also used to dirt. No matter how much you clean, it is impossible to rid your home of it. (Homes are not totally enclosed and blocked from outside.) I decided if ants, gnats, dirt, etc. were in my meal or on my plate or cup, it was not going to kill me if I consumed them along with my meal. Guess what? I have not died yet!!!

Bolivia

August 8 - Food continues to be monotonous, although I've learned a few things. Boiled plátanos are sweet and delicious! . . I've also learned to make relleno quite well (rice with meat, potato, carrots, and onion in the center then fried in dough). I had a ton this weekend but the senior boys discovered I had them in my fridge and finished them off for me. I didn't mind because in my enthusiasm, I cooked way more than I could possibly eat.

September 5 - You'll be interested to know, Mom, that I can eat an entire plate of rice and beans and - if not love it - enjoy it!

October 24 - I've been practicing my churango and can now play a couple of hymns. After dinner last night Demetrio, a couple of students, and I sat around the table and sang cuecas (a Bolivian rhythm) for an hour. I love the music here and I want to learn as much as I can before I leave... If I'm depressed or frustrated, singing with the students always snaps me out of my bad mood.

January 25 - Christmas day I invited the Campos family to dinner (a family of seven kids, with very little money). We ended up cooking in the big kitchen and playing basketball all afternoon. It cost me under \$10 to buy all the food for over 30 people (I got a little carried away with my invitations). It was nice to spend Christmas among friends, and it kept me from being too homesick.

Bolivia

We have learned the Montero way to shop, cook, clean and take the micro and taxis. We know how to purify water and disinfect fresh fruits and vegetables. We have a sinfully spacious, but sparsely furnished home equipped with a new gas stove and refrigerator... The people we have encountered in Montero are gentle and very polite. Everyone (from age 2-92) greets everyone else - on the sidewalk, at church, wherever. In church gatherings and among friends, a handshake and kiss on the cheek are common upon departure. Though most people are very poor, crime is no more a problem here than in Waukesha, Wisconsin - and perhaps less common. Nevertheless we take reasonable precautions - locking our house whenever we leave, keeping valuables (like cameras) out of sight, traveling with a companion at night whenever possible.

Dangers Faced by Volunteers

Honduras

This past weekend was kind of rough. There is a festival going on in Copan. It attracts people from the villages in the mountains. Copan is usually safe because of all the tourists. Friday night I left the festival around 9:30 p.m... I did not see, actually I wasn't even paying attention, three men, strangers from the mountains, following me... My teacher saw me leave and saw the men trailing me in the dark streets so he started out after me. Enrique prevented me from being

robbed. On Sunday, two men entered a restaurant and ambushed five men. I am not exactly sure why... What I know and saw is four men dead in the restaurant and one man mortally wounded. I now know what a person who is shot in the head about an inch above the eye looks like. So, I suppose at the moment I am feeling a little scared but I am sure that will pass.

(Later)

We were going up a mountain on the rocky, sandy, unpaved road... The driver has about two inches on either side to not misjudge and have us plunge down the mountainside. Halfway up, bandits were waiting for us in the trees overhead. A loud pop and breaking glass was heard... Glass flew everywhere and we hit the deck. Fortunately, it was large rocks that were hurled at the bus. Luckily, our driver had the sense to keep on moving to a safe place and then check out the damage. The guy sitting across from me was hit with flying broken glass. He is okay. I just got glass on my clothes and a few small cuts on my arm. Both of us were in the line of fire of the glass; fortunately, no one was hit with the rocks.

(Later)

The van we were riding in had an unfortunate incident occur to it about 2-1/2 hours outside of Tegucigalpa. As we were driving along the Honduran version of a highway, the whole back axle fell off. One wheel rolled down the road. Luckily, we didn't flip or hit any oncoming cars. We were stranded for about 2-1/2 hours as CCD [Christian Committee for Development] brought another vehicle to us. About 10 minutes up the road, we entered the curving roads of the mountain. We counted our blessings and gave thanks to our driver and God, especially as we passed two multiple fatality accidents.

Bolivia

August 24 - There never seems to be a relief from the heat, even at night... With the heat have come more bugs. Now every morning I find those gross abnormally large cockroaches on my floor. I'm careful to always have shoes on! The bats have also gotten a little more courageous as of late and fly around my bed. I know I'm safe with my mosquito net, but it's still a little freaky.

September 8 - It's been well into the 90's the past couple of days. I'm covered with bites and I have a heat rash on my back, but nothing that's stopping me from enjoying life here. I've reached a new record for bites - 53, and that's only on my legs!

October 1 - Last night I found a mouse in my house and being tired, I was not in the mood to deal with it. I got one of the boys to kill it with my machete.

October 24 - One of the bats died and fell down to my floor (yuck!). However (knock on wood), the mosquitoes don't bother me as much anymore.

April 16 - The bugs right now are terrible! Some are saying that it's a different type of mosquito... Whatever it is, the bites are taking forever to heal.

May 11 - In the past month, I've had a very interesting health experience. Two boros entered my legs... The first one healed without much problem and the second one is recently healing... The reason I'm including this is to tell you how they heal them here. Everyone has their own folk cure and opinion but the teacher from the Chimane School used an interesting one. She smoked an unfiltered cigarette and blew the smoke into the palm of her hand. When she had a

piece of nicotine large enough to cover the bite, she spread it on my leg and we closed it with a band-aid. Before she covered the boro, she "called it out" by clicking her tongue. I was skeptical, but within three hours, the boro left my leg.

South Africa

I spent from Monday morning until Wednesday morning in the hospital. I had a stomach infection that was quite bad. However, I recovered quickly. (The doctor said I was supposed to be on a liquids only diet, but I convinced a nurse that I should have fish and mashed potatoes - and it was fine. The doctor walked in and saw my meal half eaten and said, "Well, carry on.")

Dealing with Frustrations and Stress

Bolivia

Yesterday, I was feeling very frustrated and inadequate. How am I supposed to teach 15 kids how to read - especially when they range in age from 5-17? I really feel at a loss sometimes, but then I just remind myself to take it one day at a time. They are still shy, but are quickly warming up to me.

Honduras

This past week has been the most difficult week of my time here... I ran out of purified water. I had to boil water for about five days. Boiling does not take away the foul taste or smell of a sewer or dump. I know the organisms were killed but I still drank DEAD PARASITES!!!

During the times of frustration, I often felt like going back home where it is cool (with a/c) or telling the folks at the office it was too difficult a place to send me... I think about the trials that I face here on a daily basis yet I am not scared, even with this cholera epidemic that is going around lately. When I think of the "danger, toils, snares" God has seen fit to deliver me from, I fear not... One thing I do know. I am called to be here in Honduras.

(Later)

I would like to share some of the trials that absolutely took me by surprise.

Minor medical inconveniences in the U.S. turned into big headaches for me in Honduras... I had allergies to the animals, the smoke caused by wood-burning stoves and burning trash, the plant life, sweat, the well water for bathing, and the sun!!!!

The biggest problem I faced, however, was the HEAT. The people at CCD [Christian Commission for Development]... felt that since I was from Houston I would be okay. What they did not realize is that I am never out in the heat in Houston. No one there is. We are outside for the minute or so that it takes us to hop into our cars. The heat was relentless. Because I was in it 24 hours a day, my body was working overtime and I was exhausted.

The last challenge, of course, was one that I was very aware of before I left and that we went over in training. I knew my lack of Spanish would make my first months difficult. Indeed, it was difficult and lonely. Of course, as my Spanish improved, other things improved. My time was emotionally draining in the sense that I felt like an animal in a zoo. I suppose I should feel flattered. Everyone was interested in what I was doing at all times. That was very unnerving for

me to have my every move, even from afar, scrutinized and talked about.

In short, my time in Tierras Morenas was the most challenging and most rewarding thing I have ever done. I hope I touched their lives as much as they touched mine.

Bolivia

Jan. 15, 2001 - Everything takes longer here! Preparing meals, finding a shower curtain, purifying drinking water, drying laundry on humid days, traveling from one community to another, preparing lesson plans and translating them into Spanish... Clean water is not generally available. Lack of concern for sanitation disturbs me. Unrefrigerated meat hangs in the market, bags of household trash are pitched over the fence or dropped by the walk at the Colegio Metodista where we live and an old water heater rusts away in our yard.

March 1, 2001 - When we returned to Montero last weekend we found four boxes of Sunday School curriculum waiting for us! (mailed November 3rd). They went by ship to Santiago, Chile, up the western slope of the Andes mountains to La Paz and down the eastern slope to Santa Cruz and Montero. They were a bit damp from humidity, but now are all quite fine...

We were also welcomed home by daily rain, lots of mosquitoes, a mildewed suitcase (we closed the windows in the extra bedroom), a dead mouse in an empty wastebasket, a live tarantula in the middle of our bedroom floor, and free musical entertainment every night from 8:30 p.m.-3:00 a.m. at nearby Carnival celebrations.

Dealing with Poverty

Belize

Beggars on the main streets everywhere. Women with children are especially hard to pass or to say "no" to. Church members are able to identify the regulars who are on dope (crack mostly). Several panhandlers have come to the door with good stories. In sharing these stories with colleagues, they say that I was taken in.

Kenya

For weeks Lydia, our twice a week house girl, had been asking us and the Dunn-Wilsons (English missionary couple)... to come meet her family and have Sunday dinner... So after church... we bumped down the dirt road and arrived about 12:30, parked outside an "entrance," and entered the "compound." What a greeting we received! A smiling Lydia and her husband Julius, and behind them several other family members: Isiah and his pretty wife and baby; Cella, Burt's secretary, several other young adult relatives, and about 25 wide-eyed children who all seemed to be between about two and ten...

This compound is much smaller than the spacious yard surrounding the house which we occupy. I'm guessing there were eight or ten small tin roofed "houses," a small barn, three cows, hens and baby chicks everywhere... Lydia's home was one of the bigger and "fancier" of the houses. We sat in her living room. There was a couch, two chairs, a coffee table, a buffet and three stools. That left about two square feet of open space. The four visitors, Lydia, Cella, Lydia's three children, Cella's two all ate in and around the coffee table. The men ate in the kitchen but joined us for a birthday cake and some simple toys for Lydia's Moses who was five last week. Everyone was so proud to have us there, and we adjourned to the outside and had

our pictures taken with, it seemed like, EVERYONE! We went home with two large containers of left-over rice and mashed potatoes and beans to split between us... One of the family chickens had been killed for the occasion - cut in small pieces and not a scrap of that was uneaten.

The downside to this heartwarming visit is that Lydia is the only regularly employed member of her whole family... Fortunately the poor in Kenya don't have many needs - the children have few clothes, and no toys, the grown-ups have an unending patience and willingness to do without... With all those mouths to feed, WE ended up with the leftovers.

Honduras

Walking up and down the hills on the cobblestone streets was difficult for me, at first. But every time I saw an older woman with three young children at her side and carrying a year-old baby with her arm, and on the other shoulder carrying a large cloth bag full of melons to sell at the market, I realized how very insignificant my silent lament to myself was. Add to this each young child carrying a bag of things to sell... All, mother and children, walking with no shoes.

(Later)

Last year, as I worked with the very poor children in Tierras Morenas, I came across a boy of 11, Nery. He lives with his mother and two younger sisters. Though all the families in the pueblo are poor, his household would be considered one of the poorest. As I taught Nery and then had him work for me, I saw how intelligent he was. He had a deep desire to continue his studies beyond the 6th grade, which would normally be the end of the road for poor school-children.

My friends, the boy had the potential to do far greater things than to start, at age 11, working as a campesino (peasant farmer) in the fields with his machete. I knew I needed to help; this child. Why? Because years ago, when I had nothing but a sick and tormented soul, one person saw potential in me and extended the hand of friendship. Because of the action of that one person (reminding me of my worth and that I was a child of God and telling me of his love for me and of God's love for me), my life eventually took a different path - a path toward the good. It is my desire to give to others what was given to me so many years ago. I saw potential in Nery - with a lot of hard work and with God's help, he could not only change his life, but be in the position in the future to help his family, his pueblo, and his country.

With my decision to help made by my heart, I then thought my plan through with my head. I soon realized - what a monumental task! I realized that not only did Nery need God's help, I did also, as I tried to come up with different ways to send him to school. God sent help my way as I communicated the concerns of my heart with various people at St. Paul's. We soon had a plan. It started first with our children during Vacation Bible School as I taught the kids in my mission centers: Club-Can-Do. I taught them about life in Honduras, especially about the life of a certain 11-year-old boy. Those children brought their pennies from home, along with their offerings of all kinds of school supplies. Their "can-do" spirit would help a boy in another country go to school. I then did programs for different groups at church. Several folks donated money to help Nery with school expenses and the Rutabaga children will be doing a fund-raising event.

One of the first things I did after I arrived back in Honduras on December 28th was to travel to Nery's pueblo and let him know that everything was set for him to begin school. As I headed toward Nery's house, he looked up and saw me. We both then grinned and ran toward each other. As we hugged for several minutes, Nery started to cry. After informing Nery and his

mother the plans for his living arrangements at the school he would be attending, we gave the family some of the gifts from you all.

After leaving, I shared with Rev. Jose Rodas my experience of Nery crying in my arms. Jose then explained why that had occurred. Many volunteers, whether on a 10-day mission trip with a work team or individual long-term volunteers like myself, with the best of intentions, say things or make promises to people they become close to on mission trips in the poor pueblos. Going home, they have every intention of fulfilling these promises. However, life goes on... family responsibilities, demands from work, making car or house payments... the experience of the mission trip soon becomes a distant memory.

The problem is, the people in the pueblos remember the promises made by representatives from churches. Apparently, even though I gave my word to Nery, soon after I left, the older, more experienced members of Tierras Morenas told the boy to forget about anything I had promised. "She will not be returning." The tears Nery shed that day in my arms were tears of joy; I remembered my promise - Nery would be going to school.

Nepal

As my friend and I walked in the "tourist" city where I went to provide pastoral care, we passed the tiniest shack made of pieces of tin, some pieces of a cardboard box and a floor of cow dung and mud. A man sat out front pounding metal with a hammer and three ragged children ran to greet us, calling us "my friend" in Nepali - asking for nothing except a friendly greeting. The father clasped his hands, smiling and greeting us with "Namaste." Their shelter was just next door to a 3-story brick house. In fact, theirs was the only one so rickety on the entire road. Later a missionary was with us as we passed again and as he held one little girl, he said, "This is an outcaste family who are Christians and go to our church."

Mexico

In the Colonia 27 de Febrero the work at the home of the widow, Ana, and her five children drew to a close as Augustín and his cousin, Martín, repaired the roof. This home now has a concrete floor, a new outhouse, a repaired roof (it was collapsing), a paint job on the exterior, and the removal of the old outhouse (it had collapsed). There was enough time to see first hand the difficulties associated with dirt floors. When it is dry, there is always dust or powder in the air. When it rains, it can be damp for up to a week after even a gentle rain. And when it rains, as it did last week (up to 4" in some areas), the home has running water, albeit the undesirable kind.

Vietnam

All along the way were children laughing and waving at us, swimming and laughing and waving or walking on the roads lining the water, laughing and waving. Hello, hello they all said. (Children all the time say hello to me. I'm a foreigner, exotic.)

And I thought, how can these children be so happy in such poverty. I thought of the different poverty I've recently seen: here, in Colombia, in Mexico, at home. In my country, very poor people have dirty faces and lead brutish lives. But not here. Sure, there are beggars but mostly the crippled or maimed; very few people seem to have lost hope or, more importantly, self-respect. I thought about a young boy, maybe ten years old, that Pio and I used to see at a toll booth when we drove between Armenia and Cali. Always in the same place, the same clothes, the same stance: standing erect, eyes glazed, hand extended toward cars pulling away

from the toll both. He could have been a statue - was a statue. I thought of another boy I once saw, back turned, facing a fence: glue sniffer. I was told, perhaps the world just then lost a Mozart.

Bolivia

We are wealthy beyond belief to most of our neighbors. Some of them sell food or handicrafts on the street. Men shovel sand from the river bottom into their trucks and sit along the highway in front of the colegio all day waiting to sell it. Whole families of 10 or 12 people live in one or two 12 square foot rooms, sometimes without a bathroom. Some homes have dirt floors and no glass or screens on the windows. The minimum wage is the equivalent of \$64 a month. Unemployment is very high - at least 20% -- and underemployment is probably 50%.

Shopping

Vietnam

Last week I exchanged a couple of hundred dollars in travelers checks for dong, the Vietnam currency. On the way back to the office I needed air in my bike's tires so I got some; the normal cost is 200 or 500 dong, the d200 note (no coins here) being the smallest denomination. Since I had almost three-million dong (the exchange rate is d14,500 to \$1) I felt pretty magnanimous, so I offered the attendant two d500 notes. No, no, no, he said and gave one back to me. It made my day.

Bolivia

My tennis shoes finally bit the dust (the soles peeled off and then literally broke in half) so I had to make a special trip to Yucumo to buy some Bolivian sneakers. They are certainly much more reasonable, only \$2.50.

Ordinary / Extraordinary Experiences of Volunteers

Vietnam

Last week a group of women from Arkansas visited us, preliminary to a trip to Cambodia, Thailand, and then an International Women's Forum conference in Singapore. It included a former and the current Arkansas First Lady. Here they participated in a WiLD (Women in Livestock Development) tour. Wednesday, the 18th, we all took a two-hour boat ride up one of the Mekong River tributaries to Dong Thanh, a village of 528 families. In February, 2000, about 50 women in Phuoc Thanh hamlet, one of two in the village, formed an organization, Women Group I, to support each other in crop production, animal husbandry, and marketing activities. Heifer Project International has supported the women's group with loans of about \$35 US to each member and also with technical assistance. (Before the group was formed, families usually obtained high interest loans, from 10 - 20% per month.) The return on investment at year's end is outstanding, from 30 - 100% which means the members are now able to pay taxes for the construction and maintenance of roads and bridges which means it is easier for them to get their produce to market. Also, crime and other social problems seem to have declined in the area. We attended a banquet for the members where the Arkansas ladies presented awards to outstanding achievers. The demeanor of both groups of women during the ceremonies was very humbling to this man. And at the same time I was so proud to be a part of this organization and proud of those Arkansas ladies. The boat trip back in the dark also had some interest - we hit a

log and lost the ability to maneuver. Another boat towed us but it had engine problems 2/3 of the way back. Our dinner scheduled for 7:00 PM started about ten. I was told to expect adventures.

(Later)

At the guest house where I'm staying... I heard about a new species of deer recently discovered north of Hanoi, the first new mammalian species found in this or the past century. Only one individual was found but they suspect others. Anyway, some Danish journalist paid a bounty on the critter, had it shipped to Denmark, stuffed, and put on display at some university. Seems the Vietnamese authorities were upset and it was returned.

Bolivia

Last Saturday afternoon Mary baked bread with the women of Cristo Obreros (Workers for Christ) church. While the outdoor oven was heating, several women mixed four kilos of rice flour, two kilos of mashed yuca, a kilo of melted pig lard, two kilos of grated goat cheese and several cups of water with salt and sugar in solution. After thoroughly kneading the dough, we all shaped the dough into little rings and placed them on greased metal sheets. They baked in about fifteen minutes in a very hot oven.

Guatemala

Hola everyone. It has been another rather "normal" week here, which means once again we have been back and forth from the very depths of the pit to the pinnacle of the mountain top! A team of volunteers in Dallas is readying the equipment for shipment to Guatemala in the next few days. Thanks to UMCOR and all the willing volunteers in Dallas we are nearly ready to call the truck to pick it up. Once the equipment leaves Dallas we understand it will be at the clinic site in Camanchaj in 7-10 days! THAT'S FAST!

We have received funding support from Paradise Valley UMC in Phoenix to hire the Guatemalan physician we need for the clinics, for one day a week in each. We have also received donations to provide for a nurse and pharmacy person as well. So-now we have staff, opening date (June 14), and equipment arriving around the same time!

Philippines

Recently at 3:30 a.m. I awoke to the screaming of some unknown woman... I jumped out of bed and grabbed my clothes. I ran outside to see what was going on. It turns out that Holy Week had started and the Catholics in this town have a tradition of a continuous "wailing passion" service for the next seven days. It's a live performance from a site unknown to me, but they sang the same "wailing as if you are dying" songs all day and night. They had erected a large loudspeaker near my room and it blasted all day. It was not supposed to stop for seven days - 24 hours a day! Fortunately (for me) something broke and it stopped after only two days.

These last two weeks, I've been volunteering as a teacher for Vacation Church School. I guess I was more of a teacher's aide, since I didn't really do that much teaching. I was responsible for visual aids. I drew lots of pictures. I held up signs and carried chairs. I sang songs and danced in circles. I jumped up and down and made airplane noises. I couldn't communicate very well with the kids. None of them could speak English, but they did a good job parroting every word out of my mouth. It sounded like I had an echo following me everywhere I went...We had about 30 children from the community. We didn't have a church or classroom to meet in, so we met

under a big tree beside the rice field.

Nepal

"She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger - there was NO ROOM for them to stay in the inn." We have read this story, many times, put on our bathrobes, located a cane or two, even had a live cow or sheep in the scene. We know that it is a story of another age - at least 2,000 years ago...

I now live in a country where that story is lived out every day and it is the year 2000... In this culture people do suffer, notably pregnant women. There is little health awareness, and tradition says that women in labor must go to the cowshed to give birth to avoid the gods' anger if they delivered in the home. After delivery, they must stay in the cowshed for 20 days eating a prescribed diet. This practice contributes to the very high infant and maternal mortality rate. There is hope. United Mission to Nepal has two auxiliary nurse midwives in that area who give as much care as possible to the mother and child and work to move the baby "out of the manger" and into the home.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

My first term as a teacher ended yesterday, and it ended in style! My 7th-9th grade history class had been studying Latin America (two of the five students are Argentinean and had never really been taught the history of Argentina or South America), and along with the actual history of Latin America we made up our own countries with flags, maps, and histories that were tangentially related to Latin American history. We had also drawn a map of Latin America (to which we had added our countries), and we spent the last week of the term playing a modified version of Castle Risk with our own countries as the centers of our empires and the rest of Latin America as the battleground...

(Later)

Overall, second term went very well. I barely got in the literature syllabus I'd written for my 7th-9th graders, "Representations of Good and Evil in Literature," to the point that I was "forced" to throw a Star Wars marathon party for my students where we ate lots of junk food and watched 4-1/2 hours of Star Wars movies. They suffer so much having me as a teacher...
South Africa

On Christmas day, a collaboration of churches from the inner city held a Christmas lunch for the homeless, serving chicken, three bean salad, potato salad, beet root salad, a can of soda, custard, and Christmas cake to each person. We had about 800 people attend. Also, a nearby congregation donated a lot of nice toys to give to children for Christmas. That was the best part of the day for me. We probably had about 100 children, but had so many toys that kids were coming back three and four times. Toys are a great thing about Christmas, and it was great to see the happiness in their eyes...

Nepal

I was wakened this morning at 6:25 a.m. by a very enthusiastic knock on the door. First I had to find something to put on as answering the door in one's nightgown, no matter how long it is, is not an option in Nepal. Rachel was asleep upstairs, probably had her earplugs in as she is trying to recover from a horrendous night on call and trying to catch up on her sleep. So I went

to the door to find a woman who began talking in rapid fire Nepali. I figured out she was a census taker and I was about to be included in the official 2001 Nepali census. This is great irony as I missed the 2000 U.S. census! Of course, I could not understand her and told her so in my pigeon Nepali. Then she asked for my name which I had to spell very slowly in English for her. She kept asking me how many people lived here and I kept telling her two. But she didn't believe me, it is pretty unbelievable in Nepal that only two people would live in a ten-room house. But she kept asking, "How many people?" and I kept saying "two." Finally I gave her Rachel's name and added Dr. so I think she figured it out. She did not ask any other questions, like age, nationality, residence status, etc. It just must be a nose count. So much for a quiet sleep-in on my only day off in the week...

Yesterday, I had a great adventure. I went along with Shukun, the principal of nursing campus, and Sharon G., the new 23-year-old BSN nurse from Oregon with one whole year's experience under her belt, who is here as a new peace corps volunteer. They went to visit the second year students who are living in a village about 45 minutes drive from campus for a month as they do their community health experience. 15 students and one instructor live in a little village home for one month as they do a community assessment and then design and carry out their community interventions, mostly health teaching.

The instructor is Sunita, my favorite young Nepali faculty, and I think she has a huge job living with the students day and night for one month... This is a big responsibility, as in Nepal, she is very responsible for the behavior and safe keeping, meaning keeping the young students away from any interested young village men, as that is a huge responsibility in Nepal, to protect the virtue of young girls. Not to mention dealing with the political unrest now. The principal says they usually try to stay close to the police post for protection and safety but of course that is a very unsafe place now and they have to stay far away from it.

The students sleep on mats on the floor, eight to a room and Sunita this time is lucky enough to have her own room. They sleep and do their work on the second floor and the kitchen where they have to cook for themselves is on the third floor. I met the students who were coming back from the community assessment and they were complaining that they had to walk too far and it was too hot. I got some pictures, the students in their beautiful purple cotton saris with their umbrellas for shade...

Half of the students were working in the health post, staffed by a community health worker, who does antenatal checks, immunizations, and mild illness management. This health post wasn't too bad, it was roomy and fairly clean. This village is a Brahmin, high caste Hindu village, with some low caste laborers living in it and it looked fairly well off to me. I was amazed at the amount of gold jewelry all the women were wearing, but of course they wear all their savings as it is the safest thing to do and it is the custom. There were several older women sitting on the chautari, the stone resting place around the tree in the middle of the village, and they were very eager to let me take their pictures... Of course all the children quickly gather round and want their pictures taken also...

All in all it was an amazing trip, 45 minutes bumping along on the dirt road on the side of the hills. The countryside around Tansen is absolutely gorgeous now, green and lush... The rice fields are beginning to be planted. They start with a patch of very thick plants which is the seed bed. Then they prepare the rest of the fields, mostly plowing with buffalo and breaking up clods of dirt with hand tools. Then they flood the field and groups of people take the rice seedling and transplant them in the field in rows about four inches apart. The planters are usually women who work in a long line moving across the fields... Sometimes you can hear them sing as they plant,

it is a happy time as the rice is such a significant part of their life and culture...

We had a real tragedy on the hospital compound this last week... A Swiss family with three young sons were keeping goats as family pets... The goats got out of their pen and ate their way through the nursing campus garden before they were discovered. Then the naughty goats were tied to ropes and stakes. But then one night, a leopard which apparently lives in a cave not far from the compound, had himself or herself a tasty feast. No more pet goats.

(Later)

I am half way through my work in the hospital... One of my biggest jobs has been to teach the students about the value of play for sick children. The hospital has a lending toy service started by the wife of the executive director who is a nurse. So every day the toy cart comes around and each child is given a toy. The ones that are too sick to play with toys are given big shiny balloons. It is a real task to teach the students that play is important for children and the toy cart helps so much. Each student spends a day with the toy cart, helping the children and the parents pick appropriate toys. But we have had good successes with this toy ministry and the students are beginning to see my point about the value of play. For instance, we had a little five-year-old who had major abdominal surgery... On his third day after surgery when he was hardly moving, he got a truck which would go on its own by a friction mechanism. The toy people demonstrated it on his bed and soon we noticed that he was insisting his dad pick him up and put him on the floor. He then spent twenty minutes playing with the truck, sending it back and forth to his dad and anyone else who would play with him. By the time he went back to bed, he was moving much better and he had a huge smile on his face. There was another little boy who had had a chest tube for fluid in his lung and although the chest tube was out, he was not breathing deeply and his temperature was going up and his lungs were sounding congested again. So Dr. Sunil ordered him to blow up balloons every two hours and we got him a good supply of balloons from the toy cart. The child changed right before our eyes, he started to move and to work hard to get the balloons to go up. Even I who believe in the value of toys for kids was amazed with the improvement in him. By the next morning, he was down to one balloon left, his temperature was normal and his lungs were clear and he was moving about without pain...

I am pleased to say that the students also quickly figured out that in addition to diversion these children needed better nutrition and better "personal hygiene" as the students call it. So the students are doing classes in what kinds of foods are important to eat to help heal bones...

And the personal hygiene story is another challenge. I insist that all the children in the ward get at least two baths with shampoos a week and this is a big job convincing everyone this is important. Remember it is monsoon, 90 degrees with high humidity, and the ward has 8 children in a space smaller than my living room... But by the second day, even the most reluctant students have figured out that yes, the children really do need baths. The other challenge is lice control. Oh yes, did I forget to mention that lice, bed bugs and cockroaches live on the ward in addition to the patients?... I'm afraid the whole ward and work situation would not meet OSHA standards in the U.S. But the students are getting lots of very good experience and I am busy.

Arizona, U.S.A.

The College has chapel service every Tuesday and Thursday. We get to hear nervous students as they preach their first sermon as well as other students who are formalizing their education and are as polished and interesting as any good pastor preaching out in the community. We

also are treated to some students who mix native American customs with traditional Christian practice. Every Sunday a Methodist American Indian Church meets on campus. Hymns are sung in Kiowa, Navaho, Cree and other tribal languages. A Navaho woman pastor leads the congregation. This service starts on what they call "Indian time." That means they start the service when enough members show up.

Ghana

Our first few weeks in Ghana, conversation with [11-year-old daughter] Celia went much like this: "I don't get it, Mom. Why did you and Dad bring us here, anyway? Everything is so different. There is nothing, I mean nothing like home. Everything is strange - this house, the food, people treating us like we're zoo animals or something, calling us Brunees - "

"-So you'd know there's more to life than buying beanie babies at the mall," I said wisely. "I already know that so can we go home now?" Brief silence. "So why did you and Dad bring us here?"

"So that when you grow up you can go anywhere in the world, and not be afraid to leave home" I replied philosophically. "Well I can do that now, so can we go home? Mom? Why did you and Dad bring us here?"

"I have to say I don't know, Celia..."

Celia tried out the neighborhood Catholic school. Then [her 8-year-old brother] Drew tried it too. It was the best school in Sunyani, yet there were no books. With more than 50 children in each class, maintaining order was difficult. Crowds formed when Celia or Drew opened a math workbook or paperback novel.

Twice a week, Selah arrived to wash our clothes. She pulled two enormous pans from under a table in the kitchen and took the clothes out to the yard where she slapped shirts together, pitted underwear against towels, and bleached colors to mediocrity... Her brother Thomas, a tailor, would appear at unexpected moments at the school, in the middle of a city street or in front of the vegetable stands and ask if everything was all right. We called him our angel. Celia and Drew said he had the biggest smile they'd ever seen. He sewed for us Ghanaian outfits and a special, surprise shirt and dress for Drew and Celia...

Our last morning in Sunyani, we caught the 5 a.m. bus to Accra, the capital city, where we would fly out to Johannesburg,... then home. As the bus pulled out, Celia saw something we hadn't had time to get to. "We just haven't been here long enough," she said. I think she's got it now. Maybe better than her mother.

Senegal

On Saturday I went to a wedding with Sylvia, my daughter... The family is Pular and not Wolof so I had no idea what to expect... We arrived at the location of the reception two hours after the appointed time and found the party still going strong, in fact dinner was still being served. There was meat AND veggies in the bowl along with the rice.

Now you ask about the ceremony. Well so did I. Apparently the men go to the Mosque and do the paperwork and then return for the party. I say apparently since the groom never did show up while we were there. In former times the bride sat in a room receiving visitors for weeks before

the big day. Today it is two days in the village and either two hours or not at all in Dakar. The absence of the groom seemed to pose no problem to the bride who was walking around talking to people.

By walking around, I mean walking around the neighborhood. There was a tent set up on the street in front of the apartment with a DJ and LOUD Senegalese music (always a complicated drum beat). The women danced and got somewhat wild with kicking and rotating of bellies that they bared during the dance. The guys sat on the sidelines and drank tea. I was given a good seat on the sidewalk while Sylvia mingled with the crowd. After a while the Toobab's presence became normal and I was ignored, except by the people who passed in the street.

Ever forget to buy a wedding gift? No problem in Senegal. I saw a family member buy a bowl and a cover for the bowl from a passing street vendor and present it to the bride. I thought it was pretty funny but everybody else thought it was normal. We left after two hours. The DJ had packed up his speakers and had left, but the party was in full swing and would go on all night. Or so I was told. At one point three women Greols (professional singer/story tellers) sang to the bride in Pular. They had GOOD voices. It was a quiet well mannered party since there was no alcohol and apparently no family arguments to settle.

Mexico

People in Matamoros are not prepared for cold, damp weather. The orphanage nor the homes I have visited in Derechos Humanos and the colonias around it do not have heat... Through the efforts of many volunteers and Church World Service, all at Casa Bethel had blankets this past winter and about another 2,000 were moved into the colonias in small quantities so as to stay under the "radar" of customs on the other side. One set of blankets donated by volunteers we allowed a special arrangement. The community wanted to help an elderly lady receive relatively expensive treatment for a blood disorder and collected enough to help her by asking for donations from those helped by the donated blankets - maybe a few pesos at most. This colonia very much values dignity and community - maybe \$75 was raised to help this lady and no one was denied a blanket. In another case we were experimenting at the fishing villages an hour outside of Matamoros with dry latrines to combat contamination in these small places. It was cold the day we were there with Fidencio and Julio, two carpenters leading the construction of the dry latrine. Many kids were without shoes and no one had coats. Fidencio and Julio returned to their communities two hours away, told their communities, collected items and returned to distribute them - as soon as they could...

Three families from Derechos Humanos invited me to go fishing with them at a beach about an hour outside of Matamoros. Yesterday we went, not just to the beach but to the mouth of the Rio Grande at the beach. The river now stops about 100 yards from the gulf. There were more than a few of us on the Matamoros side, enjoying the experience. On the Texas side was a lone Border Patrol vehicle guarding this 100-yard strip of land. The river is supposed to flow into the gulf. The fishing was done with a net that was cast by one person. And the fishing was not for sport, as I had assumed, but for food on Monday. The fish were small, almost like bait. The crabs were a bit more acceptable. Best of all was the fresh air to replace the powdery dust which invades your lungs in the colonias and of course the absolute joy of seeing the children at play in such a different environment.

(Later)

This is a short note about the medical/relief mission last week to the state of San Luis Potosí

about 10 hours from Matamoros to a community of indigenous people called Huastecos. The invitation to go there came from Alejandro, the president of the comité of the colonia Derechos Humanos in the 20 de Noviembre section of Matamoros. The doctor was Dra. Nancy Rodríguez of Proyecto Vida Digna in the colonia... Donated items came from Digna and individuals in Matamoros. Alejandro and his wife, Laura, organized the donations and presented them to about 200 people who seemed to materialize out of nowhere late on a Saturday afternoon in the Los Huastecos community. Alejandro spoke to the people about us and about God and when he spoke of God these were words that came from deep inside of him... Although there was not enough food and clothing and soap for all, these people responded as though they had complete confidence that there would be enough for all. And some of these people were men who had just hopped off the back of a truck after miles and miles of dusty travel and hours and hours cutting sugar cane with machetes. After this semi-formal meeting, a few women and then more and then the men gathered around Dra. Nancy and began to speak of the medical problems of the larger community of at least 375 families... It still amazes me to see how these persons immediately identified Dra. Nancy as someone to whom they could speak with such confidence, partly because she is a doctor but more that they could sense she has a heart full of compassion... The depth and gracefulness of the people I met was unmistakable...people who said that they were poor but with a hug offered what they had in the way of food and a place to sleep to me when I return to Huastecos. They told me they would care for me.

Bolivia

September 8 - Last weekend, I had an interesting experience at the church. One of the poles holding the thatched roof up broke and, although it didn't fall, half the roof slid down to the ground. To fix it, they brought a new pole from the monte and peeled the bark off with a machete... After they peeled the pole, they hoisted it up to its place in the roof with about ten men. After they finally got it into place, it was a question of pushing the fallen roof back into place. The entire process lasted about two hours.

November 12 - On November 2, the Day of Todos Santos, Doña Agida invited me to spend the day with her family. Since I didn't have class that day, I left early and arrived in time for breakfast. After breakfast, I helped the women prepare the lunch. I washed potatoes in the river, and learned to peel yucca. Meanwhile, many of the men from the nucleo had begun to drink chicha (the alcoholic kind). Since I was busy cooking with the women, I was spared having to deal with that problem. It was fun and I got to know the women of the community a little more. Now I'm able to tell who is married to whom, how many kids they have and their names. After lunch, we went to the cemetery. The families cover the graves of their loved ones with sweet bread, candy, and in some cases coca leaves and cigarettes. The people of the community make their rounds to pray at each grave and then a family member gives them a plate full of the sweets. At the end of the day, the graves are once again empty. It reminded me a little bit of Halloween and kids going door to door for their sweets. The women had their traditional dress of skirts, blouses and bowler hats, but instead of multiple colors it was all black. Doña Agida took good care of me telling me what to do and where to go when I was unsure of what to do. Overall, it was an interesting day. I finally got to experience this holiday that before I had only read about.

January 25 - I went to the INRA office this morning (land issues) to look for the Chimanes' documents, since I've looked everywhere else. Trinidad as the capital of the Beni should have them, but guess what? Nothing! Anyways, their favorite pastime is to send me from office to office, but I think at last they sent me to the right one. I ended up at the Catholic church's office for indigenous affairs talking to an extremely articulate lawyer/pastor... They deal with land in

smaller pieces (not reserves) which is exactly what we have. He showed me seven titles that they just got, absolutely amazing for this part of Bolivia. He also told me that they have been wanting to work in my area, but have no contact. Now, Feb. 10th he is flying out to do a land workshop with all the Tsimanes. My job is together them all, which mean a lot of walking in these next few days!... I tell you, the church down in Bolivia is amazing. So often they are the ones fighting behind the lines. It gives me so much hope.

February 14 - Saturday night the lawyer arrived along with his assistant... By 9:00 the next morning, we started the meeting to discuss land issues. Six Chimane communities came: Bajo Colorado, 10 de Junio, Aguas Negras, Chocolotal, Santa Rosita, and Tacuaral. The largest community is Tacuaral with 63 families. The meeting took forever, since everything was translated into Tsimane. At one point, I counted over 100 people! Four of the communities already have the documents that legally establish them as an indigenous community. Two others have no papers, which means as far as the government is concerned, they don't exist.

I was extremely impressed with the lawyer. He explained the process clearly and encouraged questions. The communities had to formally decide if they wanted the support of the office, and all six communities agreed... They drafted a formal letter asking for support, and it was all signed and complete by 10:30 that night.

Now, I've had some warnings about my role in this issue from various people (I even had someone tell me careful not to be mixed up in any terrorist activities.) However, Dr. Filemon is very clear that this doesn't have to be a confrontational process. His meetings are always open to everyone, because there is nothing secret; he is simply sharing information with the people that never seem to get legal help.

At the end of the day, the Tsimanes presented both Dr. Filemon and Inocencio (his assistant) with a beautiful set of bow and arrows. Each set had different sizes, for hunting all types of animals. Everyone felt encouraged and hopeful that this is the beginning of finally getting a title for their land. I'm now convinced that land is the first step for these communities to improve their living conditions, and to maintain their culture that is quickly disappearing.

March 15 - Last Tuesday, I changed my schedule around so I had the entire day free and went to Tacuaral with Erasmo and Rosendo. The community of Tacuaral is a community that is suffering. There are 63 families but no school. Bit by bit, they are losing their land to an aggressive settler who also illegally harvests valuable wood (mara). Pílon Lajas (the NGO) has tried to build a school for the past two years with no success because some of the colonizers opposed the construction... Although the colonizer who is taking advantage of their situation has no legal right to land, he is abusing the Chimanes' non-aggressive personality. They don't yell or fight and usually when faced with a confrontation, they will walk away. However, this is not to say that they don't value their land and want to protect what they have left...

My involvement with the process is mostly one of communication between the communities and Filemon with the Catholic Church in Trinidad. It is the communities who are organizing and starting the long process of legalizing on paper their title to the land where they and their families have lived for hundreds of years... I feel honored to be allowed to participate and witness this small movement in an isolated part of Bolivia. Since I represent the Methodist Church here, I have also thought a lot about the church's role in situations of injustice. For me, it is no accident that the legal support is coming from the Catholic Church. As Christians, we have an obligation to stand with the oppressed, be it farm workers in Oregon or Chimanes in Bolivia. I have had the privilege of observing and working with people here who live a life committed to

their faith.

April 16 - Since we still had to get the Chimanes' land documents signed, Erasmo and I decided to use Friday to enter a community called Aguas Negras... Since this community doesn't have any documents we had to write their "Founding Act." . .No one can read or write so Erasmo and I dictated the document and read it back to them. Signing is done with thumbprints. I don't have a stamp pad so I brought a big black permanent marker to color their thumbs... The entire time we worked, a very curious monkey was watching me from above. I asked about his mother and they told me they already ate her. There was also a baby wild pig playing around my feet. Before we left, they served us rice, yucca and a fried egg...

While Erasmo and I were in Aguas Negras, Lisardo (a Chimane from Río Colorado) hiked into 10 de Junio to sign their documents. Lisardo has a young family and although he almost never talks, he is always the first to volunteer when we need help. With 10 de Junio we finally finished all six communities, and the next day I traveled to San Borja to leave the signed documents at the Catholic Church. Although it is only the first step, it is in the right direction, and I'm hopeful that these communities will be able to move forward with education, health and also maintain their culture.

April 17 -I want to tell everyone about a field trip we recently planned with the Chimane School. I spent more money (\$20-\$25) in order to plan the trip since there is no money available here for luxuries like field trips. The excitement of the kids made it worth it, and I wish you could have seen them as they climbed into the truck that we used to go to Rurre.

I chose Rurre since that is our school district headquarters and since many of the kids had never been before (it's only 60 kilometers away). Transportation (as usual) was the hardest to plan. A month before the trip I contracted a truck only to have it break down two days before we were supposed to leave. Panicked, I biked to our neighbor, René (they also call him "el loco") and thankfully he wasn't busy for Wednesday. Although he raised the price, I didn't have any other option.

We left Wednesday morning at 5:00. I had the kids divided into four pickup points along the road. My group was in front of the school and I was worried they would be late. However, when I arrived at 4:45 they were all waiting clean and dressed up! They must have been there since 3:00 in the morning since they had already visited the farthest Chimane hut to make sure that René was awake... By the time we picked up all the kids and left it was 6:30. We had 24 kids from Bajo Colorado and 18 from San Martín (our teacher's husband's school). The kids held the Bolivian and Beni flags all the way to Rurre shouting out greetings to all of the people we passed.

We arrived in Rurre and immediately went to the Mayor's office where they were waiting for us. My kids sang and then asked questions we had prepared the week before. Since Thursday was "Día del Niño" (Children's Day), another school was in the plaza doing a treasure hunt. When the Mayor told the kids to join in I about died! There were over 100 kids swarming in the plaza and we would have probably lost ours in the chaos. Luckily, the kids were overwhelmed and didn't stray far from the adults. We herded them to one more government office and also to the school district office. (For all the teachers, the school district office in Rurre is a two-room adobe hut with open windows. It's falling apart.)... There are 4,000 kids in the district and four persons in the office. No computers and no telephone. Materials for 2001 have still not arrived three months into the year and they haven't paid our teacher for two months.

After the office visits, we took the kids to lunch at a pension (a restaurant that serves a set menu). They had agreed to serve a complete lunch for three bolivianos per child (less than \$.50). All the kids got soup, a second course and lemonade. After lunch came the real treat that everyone was waiting for. We took all of them to San Buenaventura, the little town on the other side of Río Beni (the Beni River). We crossed in the ferry much to their delight... They played soccer in a beautiful little plaza surrounded by palm trees. Thankfully, we only had one bruised shin. I bought the little boy ice (a precious commodity here) to put on the bump and within ten minutes he ate it all!

After playing, we had another bathroom break. Basically, we told all the kids to run to the nearest tree behind a building! Some things are harder here, but others are definitely much simpler! . . We crossed the river again to board our luxurious pickup truck. We ran a little late, but we had the last child dropped off by 8:30. All of the parents were waiting by the side of the road to pick up their children. I was exhausted, mostly from worrying that I would lose a student, but it was all worth it. It was an extravagant day, but I always remember all of the places I got to see when I was younger. My students are so curious and so eager to learn. I wish they could have every opportunity possible.

May 11 - I often visit the Chimane... I recently tried some chicha (a drink) at a birthday party and it was actually pretty good. I asked them how they made it and they told me it was a mixture of corn and yucca. The next day, when I went to the water pump, Concepción was busy grinding up some corn (with a large stone) to make another pot. Curious, I went over and greeted her. She calmly leaned over and spit a mouthful of corn she was chewing into a pot before answering me! To speed the fermentation, she and Ascencio were chewing all of the corn first! So, now I know how they made the chicha I tried the day before!

Spiritual Growth

Democratic Republic of the Congo

I have been somewhat surprised to find that I have an extreme hunger for reading the Bible. I think I just needed a little bit of life experience to make it real. This certainly has been some life experience!

(Later)

I am writing this just after returning from the Sunday evening English-speaking worship service, and tonight was an incredibly moving night. We celebrated the Eucharist for the first time all year at that service, and it really brought home to me what an important part of my spiritual life the Eucharist is. All year I have been going to various churches, never understanding much of what was going on, and essentially receiving the Eucharist each time with a bunch of strangers in a language I don't understand very well. Tonight I was worried that it would be just a Methodist statement - the Lutherans wouldn't receive because it wasn't quite right, the Pentecostals wouldn't receive because it was too Papist...but after the preacher consecrated the elements and invited everyone to the table, everyone -- Congolese, American, British, French, Pentecostal, Methodist, Lutheran - came to receive the eucharist, and it was as though a longing I didn't even know I had was fulfilled. No matter what happens in these next couple of months, I know that I am much better prepared for it now.

Bolivia

I have found my prayer life to be very strong right now. Being so far from home and in little communication with family and friends, I find God is our ever-present communicator through prayer. In the same way, my relative inability to communicate with the children and people here, in Spanish, only heightens our spiritual awareness that some other being has brought us together and develops our relationships through smiles, hugs, laughter and prayer.

Honduras

One of my more inwardly satisfying experiences was New Year's Eve. We all went to a relative's house around 9:00 p.m. All of us (about 15) visited and set off firecrackers until midnight. At midnight, we sat down to a wonderful meal of turkey and other delicious foods. Before we started our meal, Rev. Rodas led us in prayer as we thanked God for His gift of family and of a New Year. What a wonderful way to bring in the New Year!

South Africa

Personally, I'm very satisfied by my time here. I feel that I have grown not only as a person but also in my understanding of my relationship with God. I have made some valuable friendships with people from all walks of life that I hope I will be able to maintain in the future.

Philippines

God has revealed much to me during my first month here in the Philippines. I have learned so many things about the nature of God and myself...

In general, I think the students here are a little more receptive to discussing spiritual things than the young people in the U.S. I'm actually amazed by the honesty of the students here. They say things that surprise me all the time. They're not afraid to admit when they're a little scared or lonely. I would do well to learn some things from them.

I frequently discuss spiritual matters with people here. Sometimes it's brief, other times a bit more involved. We have a board in the dorm where we have a daily devotional. Someone writes a verse and someone else illustrates it. Some of the drawings have been really impressive. A few of the students have questions, and I do my best to answer them. And in turn, I ask questions too...

Sometimes when a few of us get together, I pull out my chord sheets and we sing praise songs for a couple of hours. It's fun.

Vietnam

Vietnam's spiritual foundations are rich and deep. Buddhism is the prominent religion; others are Confucianism, Taoism, animism, and Christianity. Temples, pagodas, and churches are in every section of cities and along highways. Buddhist homes have an outdoor shrine containing incense. Regardless of their religious belief, all Vietnamese feel an intimate relationship with the land on which they live and have a deep faith in the continuity of their nation. I read that the secret wish of all Vietnamese is to attain *nhan* - a word borrowed from the Chinese meaning "contemplating the moon through a window - laughing off the glory and the burden of the day and instead immersing one's self in the serenity of a moonlit night."

Bolivia

We live closer to God's creation here. We hear the birds as we work. We are lulled to sleep by crickets and frogs. Night and day chickens clucking, roosters crowing and dogs barking provide background for everything we do. Last Wednesday we even heard monkeys chattering in the woods by our house, but we have not seen them. Lizards run about on the roof - and occasionally on inside walls. We even have a herd of Brahma cows pass within a few feet of our backdoor once a week. We give thanks before meals more frequently - perhaps because we are more aware of how fortunate we are, and perhaps because we are together for almost every meal. Having time (and the need) to reflect seriously on topics for church Bible studies and lectures in faith development also adds to my spiritual growth.

Nepal

What a journey of discovery this period of my life continues to be! What a joy - what a challenge! It seems that every moment I am called to confront my faith - the belief system in which I grew up and took for granted. There are no symbols of my faith here - no crosses, no doves. But on every corner there is a temple covered with red powder and flower petals and bells to ring to summon a god and a small worship center on most every house. The greatest gift we expatriate Christians have to give is to live each day as though it may be our last to show how our God is a God of love and a God of hope.

Value of Volunteering

Arizona, U.S.A.

[From an unsolicited letter sent by a mission project director:] I want to let you know what wonderful representatives of your organization Leon and Doris have been during their time at Southwest Indian School. There are so many positive adjectives I could use in telling about their ministry here, and then I would not have used all that apply.

They have found many ways to be involved both with students and staff and have been a constant encouragement to all. Everyone they have worked with has been uplifted and encouraged by their upbeat attitudes. There has been a willingness and flexibility to fill in wherever needed and do it with unusual grace.

Although their main assignment has been as part of our kitchen staff, they volunteered to fill in a real need by teaching a life skills class. They have found many opportunities to be involved in a one to one basis with students and former students both spiritually and socially. We feel blessed and privileged to have had them with us this year, and would recommend them to any other ministry where the Lord might lead them.

Advice to Future Volunteers

Honduras

Lessons I have learned:

Motorized vehicles always have the right of way. Pedestrians must move out of the way if they want to see another sunset.

Never wait to take a shower, etc., if there is water available. At different times of the day, parts of Copán are without water. You never know when it will occur.

Always have a flashlight in an easily accessible place.

Never assume purified water will be available.

Bug soup is not so bad.

Get used to people being amused with your lack of knowledge about the language and culture.

Always expect beans, eggs, and corn tortillas and never tire of them or you are in for a long (very long) stay.

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