

Students, Retired Teacher, Dental Workers Reflect On What Bolivian Trip Meant To Them

By MARK BAKER
Herald Publisher

On the final morning of our trip to Bolivia, the 30 members of this year's mission gathered for breakfast one last time in the Hotel Diplomat in downtown Cochabamba.

Time was running out. Despite being kept busy from morning until night, I wasn't able to talk to everyone to ask their reaction to the eight days of the humanitarian and educational mission. So I asked participants to jot down a few notes on what the mission meant to them.

Here's a sampling of what they had to say:

The sense of fulfillment was overwhelming. The look of love in the kids' eyes is captivating. There is so much need for care and education that we have only begun to scratch the surface.

This is a chance to give of yourself and walk away with a sense of accomplishment.
Sarah Williams, BS, RDH
La Crosse, WI

This trip was incredibly important for me because Cochabamba is my Dad's hometown. He is a humanitarian and brings school supplies and clothes 3-4 times a year for as long as I can remember. My father always taught my sister and me to learn a trade and to give back to others. The program was my opportunity to use my trade to not only treat infections clinically, but also give hygiene and dental instructions in Spanish to not only the Bolivians in the city but also the Campesinos.

Michelle Espinoza, DDS
San Diego, CA

I was apprehensive at first to get involved with the medical part as I am in a business career. However, I found myself assisting and enjoying myself. I was really surprised how calm and tolerant the kids were to pain. In some cases the expired anesthetic was not effective in numbing the kids and they were very tolerant and beautiful – strong young people!

I am not in the medical field but did help by charting and assisting... anyone can help!! It's a life changing experience.

Sheri Espinoza
San Diego, CA

My time spent in the various clinics was an eye opening experience. As a dental student, I thought I would be able to shadow some of the dentists while working. To my surprise, I was given the opportunity to do so much more. Getting my hands "wet"

helping out with extractions and amalgams was great experience I will carry with me into my dental school. This trip has truly prepared me for school in the fall, showing me the difficulties of dentistry, but more importantly the countless rewards of dentistry.

Jason Vandehaar
Chippewa Falls

Of course one of my favorite experiences here was working at Solomon Klein with the younger kids. I've never had the chance to work/observe dental procedures on little kids so it was a very new experience for me. Those kids were absolutely amazing and so full of spirit. I definitely have a few favorites that I wish I could take back with me.

I also loved going on the Chapare jungle tour. I enjoyed the bus ride the most! Driving through the country and the mountains was so beautiful and it was amazing seeing how different people live out there.

As a future dental student I definitely think this experience was most beneficial. Having all the interactions I had with all the dentists here really reassured me that this is what I want to do for a career.

Karin Mathiesen
Shoreview, Minn.

The aspect of the trip that surprised me the most was the hospitality. The natives treated me (us) like we were celebrities. This type of treatment I feel has been forgotten in the States. From the wait staff to the people on the streets, all of the Bolivians would want to say hi and see how our day was. I think that this is needed back in the States, and I plan on bringing some of the Bolivian spirit back when I return.

Joe Kaminski
White Bear Lake, Minn.

One of the highlights of the trip was the trip over the Andes to the Chapare, but since you were on the trip I won't elaborate.

My memorable experience was finding the conditions of the jails. We found them while looking for a playroom that needed painting. Unfortunately, we didn't find the playroom. We were told, "You are at the wrong jail, but please don't leave. No one helps us and the children here need help, too."

When people are put in jail, they are not given any food. Members of their family must bring it to them. Also, their whole family, including the children, lives there. They have no medicine or food and the "doctor" is an inmate that is interested in medicine.

Myrna Manier
Elma, Wash.

"Pobre"

As I watched the 25 vivacious young boys with ice cream smothered all over their arms and faces, I witnessed something I will never forget.

A six-year-old timid young boy, with chocolate dripping off his chin, innocently peered up at my friend with his lonely dark brown eyes and asked how to say “pobre” (poor) in English.

My friend was slightly shocked by the question, yet she knew exactly how to answer it. At that moment, I witnessed the most powerful expression of God’s love I ever have. She looked down kindly at the boy; her heart filled with compassion, and told him, “My friend, you are never poor when you have love!”

Instantly, the boy’s eyes softened as they filled with tears, his cheeks flushed as he grinned ever so greatly, and his wounded heart became healed of the emptiness he previously felt inside.

For the first time in his life, I believe that the boy forgot about his current state of materialistic wealth that separated him from the rest of the world. As he got lost in the beautiful illustration of love, he learned what true wealth was and that he had possessed it all along. I truly believe that we can all relate to this boy in the Bolivian orphanage, for no matter where we stand economically, we have nothing without love.

Katie Gorton
Seattle, Wash.