

## **Too Much To See, Not Enough Time to Get It Down On Paper**

Mark Baker, Chippewa Herald  
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About halfway through my series on Bolivia, I got a hunch that perhaps folks had had enough. So I conducted a random survey. To my surprise, most said they enjoyed the stories and photography, especially since over the years, they'd heard of the volunteer work done by Dr. David Crane.

My poor news staff handled me with grace. Each day, I'd come back with two more stories and a bunch of photos for them to lay out. They didn't complain or roll their eyes, even though they had a right to.

After a week, it was time to pull the plug.

But in truth, I could write another week's worth of stories and still have some left over.

The neat thing about immersing yourself in another culture is you see things as if for the first time – the land, the people, and the customs. The strengths, and the weaknesses. Every day there's something new.

I've got to admit, I'm like everyone else – there are times when the routine of home, work, family and obligations becomes mundane. Almost a burden. When you travel to a country that does not share the same bountiful material prosperity of the U.S., it wakes you up. Makes you realize that yes, we've had water problems in Chippewa Falls, but it's absolutely NOTHING compared to having your water delivered into a 55 gallon drum formerly used by Mobile Oil to deliver chemicals.

So what stories would I have told you about, had I more time?

-- My visit with Ing. Ganzalo Canelas, the publisher of the largest newspaper in Cochabamba. While we worry about knuckle-headed public officials who thumb their noses at the state Open Meetings law, his family saw their newspaper destroyed by government thugs in the early 1950s. The fire at the newspaper plant destroyed one of the largest private libraries in South America. His family was exiled until 1967, when it became safe for an independent voice to be heard once again. Mr. Canelas, by the way, has fond memories of the U.S. in general, and Wisconsin in particular. He lived in Shorewood north of Milwaukee in the mid-1960s.

--Our attempt to visit a DEA museum at a military base in the Chapare. We didn't know it, but the day we went into the jungle, an American allegedly planted bombs that exploded at hotels in La Paz, killing several people. We showed up at the gate of the military base, but were told that high level emergency meetings were going on, and no one was to be admitted until later that day. Our schedule didn't permit us to stay; later on,

we found out that the heads of the Bolivian military had flown to that base from La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz to discuss the bombings.

-- Speaking of the DEA, the city of Chinowata was once the drug capital of Bolivia, where, according to our guide, "you could buy drugs like you could buy sugar or flour." Relations between the U.S. and Bolivia soured as the U.S. tried to curtail coca production. Many Bolivians believe the U.S. is heavy handed in trying to stamp out cocaine; Bolivians saw coca as a way to put food on the table.

--As we were eating breakfast at our hotel in the jungle, two boys dressed in full naval regalia came out of the office and started getting into a taxi. Turns out it was a national holiday, the day when Bolivia observes the loss of its seaports in 1879 to Chile. Now, every year, the land-locked country holds parades and observances in hopes that someday it will once again win back the ports.

--On the day before leaving, a group of us headed to the market to buy souvenirs. Little did we know that an hour later, a monsoon rain would fall, turning the market – located in the low area of town – into a huge mud swamp. Every taxi was soon taken, buses were filled, and we had no way of getting out of there and back to our hotel. One brave woman who worked in our hotel's office eventually got us back safe and sound. A great story, no time.

--Each of the 31 people on the trip would have made a fascinating story in and of themselves. While I wrote about my experiences, they all heard, saw and felt different things. I simply ran out of time to talk to them and write about it.

--Families living in – not near, but in – the city dump, scrounging for anything of value to support themselves. Their children were running around the dump without shoes on their feet. Some of our colleagues went to the market to buy shoes for the children and hand them out.

--Likewise, when you're jailed in Bolivia, your family, not the state, has to feed you. Because of that, many families come to live behind bars with convicts.

--The great food at restaurants. Buffalo's Rodizio served 18 different kind of grilled meats – beef with garlic, plain beef, chicken, turkey breasts wrapped in bacon, pork, ham – you name it, they had it. Our group of 10 enjoyed wine, beer and soda, and then tipped the waiters generously. We split the bill, and each person's share for one of the biggest, best meals I've ever eaten in a classy restaurant was 45 Bolivianos – or \$6 U.S.

--We had a great meal of rainbow trout at an outdoor restaurant 10,000 feet up in the Andes Mountains. The unusual way it was prepared is a story in itself.

--Our tour guide, Tim Johnson, was a former street boy from Cochabamba who was adopted by an American couple. He grew up in the U.S., speaks flawless English, and later returned to his homeland, where he serves as a guide for important foreign visitors.

After seeing the good done by Dr. David Crane's humanitarian mission, Johnson joined the Cochabamba Rotary Club, and serves as a liaison on projects involving foreign Rotary Clubs.

--Jenny Goeres, a watercolor artist from Washington State, comes to Bolivia for inspiration for her paintings. Her passion for the country and its images is second only to her love of its people.

--The dental students who came to Bolivia because they heard of the good things being done by this program. If I were a dental student, like Jason Vandelaar of Chippewa Falls (who has been accepted at the University of Michigan Dental School), I can't imagine a better way to start my career than spending time seeing how established dentists give back to humanity. What a great feeling.

--Finally, the camaraderie of those on the mission was something special. I can't tell you what political parties anyone belongs to, or how they voted in the last election. But each person brought a willingness to share of themselves, and to make life a little brighter for people who have so little.

So, for those who had enough of my stories early on, just be thankful it didn't go on even longer.

On the last full day in Bolivia, I asked some of our group to write a bit about what the trip meant to them. You can find their comments elsewhere on this page. They did a great job of summarizing their feelings in a short space.

I want to thank the Chippewa Falls Rotary Club, and my boss, Jim Hopson, for giving me the chance to travel to Bolivia to see Dr. Crane's program in action. The Rotary Club does more good for this community – and outside of it – than most people will ever realize. And it's great to work for a company that not only allows, but encourages, its employees to go on a once-in-a-lifetime trip to see a bit of the world.

-- For more information: Here's how to find out more about some of the topics I've written about in this series:

- The Amanecer Foundation, which runs the 12 houses to help the street children of Cochabamba – [www.amanecer-bolivia.org](http://www.amanecer-bolivia.org)
- Dr. David Crane's website that tells of his Bolivian trips -- [www.dentsem.com](http://www.dentsem.com)
- The website of Martinez Ultra Tech Doors -- [www.utdoors.com](http://www.utdoors.com)
- The homepage of the Chippewa Falls Rotary Club, which for years has cosponsored Dr. Crane's mission to Bolivia -- [www.chippewafallsrotary.org](http://www.chippewafallsrotary.org)
- The homepage of Hands and Hearts Across America, which makes and distributes quilts to the street children each year -- [www.pasd.wednet.edu/school/fr/teacher/burnett/hands03/index.htm](http://www.pasd.wednet.edu/school/fr/teacher/burnett/hands03/index.htm)
- The homepage of the daily newspaper of Cochabamba, Los Tiempos – [www.lostiempos.com](http://www.lostiempos.com)

- The homepage of Smile Power, an organization designed to show kids in America and Bolivia that they have much in common - [www.smilepower.org](http://www.smilepower.org)