

Salt, Sweat & Seeds

A lot of good work got packed into the past six weeks!



Our son, Sam, 20, helped build adobe greenhouses in nearby Sicuani and Cusijata. The Sicuani greenhouse and another one in Santa Ana have new water lines, and all three have new roofs and newly planted seed starter boxes. Exciting progress!

In June and July Allyson Zeedrich, 23, a graduate student in the University of Illinois' School of Public Health, fulfilled her six-week practicum here. She interviewed Promotores de Buena Salud (volunteer community public health workers) trained by the mission to see how they are using their skills and whether they need more training to maximize their effectiveness. The interviews confirmed that virtually all of the Bolivian Promotores want more regular training; they want to feel more confident; and they need to know more about promoting themselves. Allyson suggested monthly meetings in which they can choose and study specific topics of interest. She facilitated a lively dialogue on how the promotores could advertise their skills. Using Allyson's computer and advice, every member of the group gleefully designed his or her own professional business card, complete with a logo and a four-color head shot.



In their final days here, Sam and Allyson, and newly arrived Ryan Kolegas, 26, wanted to see the famous Uyuni Salt Flats. (Jeff stayed home to attend to mission work and the dogs and chickens.) To get to Uyuni in far southwestern Bolivia, the four of us took a truly horrible 11-hour bus ride from La Paz. In the first half of the trip, the bus made many long, unexplained stops. In the middle of the night two separate teams of police boarded the bus – the first group was searching for abducted children; the second set demanded to see our Bolivian visas, which were in our passports back in Copa. We'd brought copies, which are considered legal for internal travel within Bolivia. The police made a big, stressful scene threatening to fine each of us. But in the end they left us with a pointy admonition and strict instructions to show our visas as soon as we returned to La Paz. (To who? Why?) Soon after that the bus hit a five-hour stretch of excruciatingly rough road. I thought our internal organs might shake loose. It was dreadfully cold. Though we were each given a tatty old blanket, there was no warmth. Ice on the windows must have been a quarter inch thick.



When we got to Uyuni our tour was changed for the sixth, seventh and eighth times – it wouldn't be a private tour, (though we quickly became friends with the two Dutch women traveling with us), the guide would speak Spanish not English, and the tour would start nearly four hours later than promised. But once our Jeep finally hit the road, we were dazzled! The salt flats are otherworldly – vast, desolate, sparkling white expanses. Once past the salt flats we saw two active volcanos, fabulous mountains, and flocks of Andean and James' flamingos. We spent the first night of the three-day tour in a thatched-roof, salt hotel. The floors were coarse, loose salt. The walls were made of formed salt bricks with salt-based mortar. To our delight, our beds were toasty warm!





Sun, wind, algae and plankton make Lago Colorada look brick red. Similarly, Lago Verde (Green Lake) shifts between spring green and grass green. At the Empexa Hot Springs, the guys stripped to their skivvies and jumped in. Getting out, alas, was a frosty experience. At our next stop, Ryan put his underwear on the Jeep's hood in hope they'd dry a bit. They froze stiff!

At right: Lago Colorado

NIC UMVIM Team

Last week we had the pleasure and honor of hosting a team of seven volunteers from the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church. The team worked three days in Ancoraimes at the south end of Lake Titicaca helping to build a retreat center.



The NIC team at our house minus Orlando who was still conducting pastoral training.



They arrived in Copa Aug. 5, the day before Bolivian Independence Day. Copa was jam packed – lots of visitors from elsewhere in Bolivia and hundreds and hundreds of vendors from Perú. Despite the holiday festivities which ran nearly a week, the team accomplished a lot of work.



Larry Hummel, Wally Calaway, Jeff and some local church members built and installed windows, ran water lines and started seeds at the Sicuani greenhouse. Kim Hummel, Doreen Frazer, Jennifer Calaway, Elisa Gatz and I distributed school supplies to 311 students in Marca Kosco, Huacuyo Valley and Alto San Pedro. At the same schools, the women from the NIC team taught basic dental hygiene and gave all the students and teachers new tooth brushes and tooth paste.



Pastor Orlando Moller holding the rapt attention of his students

Pastor Orlando Moller, also with the NIC team, led a 2-day training session for 21 pastors and lay church leaders in this region. The church folks were moved to tears, thoroughly loved his presentation, and begged him to come back to help train newly appointed church leaders. We're hoping to schedule another pastoral training session with Orlando in February or March of next year.



Thanks to a Virtual Mission donation from the Missions Work Area of Downers Grove First United Methodist Church, in mid-July we were able to give uniforms to poor students at Cusijata School. We were able to negotiate a great price – about 50 Bolivianos, or just over \$7 per uniform! The kids strutted with pride!

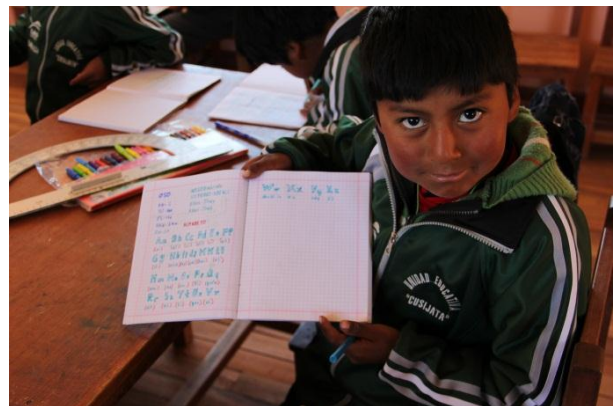
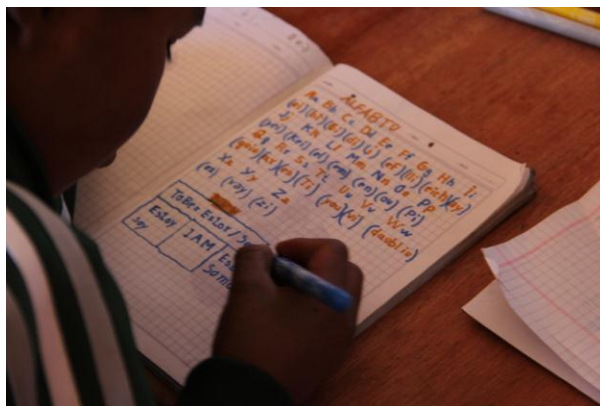
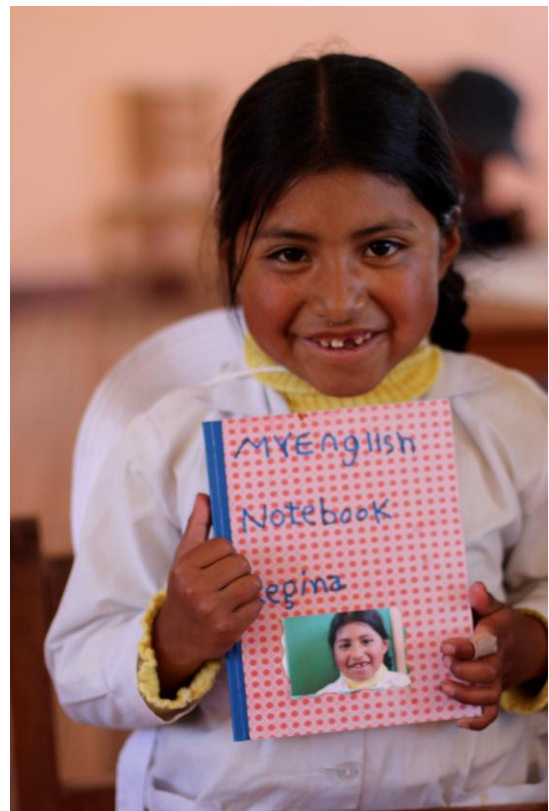
With a few days advance notice, our neighborhood president declared July 23 a mandatory community work day (failure to comply would result in a fine of 100 Bolivianos, about \$15). Jeff, Sam, Ryan and I gladly joined about 225 of our neighbors for a day of hard work, devout coca chewing, and great fun. A former resident recently donated a piece of land that will become the site for a multi-functional community and sports center. The primary task of the day was to move 50 to 55 tons of rocks and boulders uphill to the site to build the foundation. Ryan and Jeff estimated that our chain gain slung 5 rocks every ten seconds. It was a blast. By late afternoon, we were all naming the rocks by shape: “Palta!” (avocado), “Silla de bicicleta!” (bicycle seat) “Futball!” “Pizza!” “Texas!” ... and laughing hard. Mandatory community work days may seem odd by American standards, but they’re an economical way to get a job done, and they’re a lot of fun.



On July 30 and 31, we bade goodbye to Sam and Allyson. We miss their practical helpfulness, cheerfulness, and game spirits!



Happily, Ryan will be with us for five months. He's a volunteer English teacher in a nearby K-12 school. In his first week, he had the kids – and their teachers – singing the Alphabet Song and saying simple English sentences! The kids vie with one another to take him by the hand and lead him around the school grounds, often calling out “Let’s go to English class!”



I suppose the text and photos are proof enough: we're doing fine, and feeling good, happy, and effective. But we do miss friends and family from the US. Please: let us hear from you! We'd like to sign off with some photos of the beautiful people we are so privileged to work and live side-by-side with. Meet a few of the folks whose lives have changed because of your support.....oh, and if you have enjoyed the photos thank Ryan.

With
Love,

Deb &
Jeff

