

Jikisiñkama, Team Onalaska!

Our hearts are still soaring and our pantry, our stock of public health teaching supplies and first aid materials, as well as my previously meager store of footwear, have grown substantially, thanks to last week's visit from Team Onalaska (Wisconsin).

Construction workers on the team helped local Aymaran folks build a new greenhouse in Sicuani, and helped reroof an existing greenhouse in Santa Ana, Bolivia. Nurses and public health workers on the team taught basic nutrition and dental hygiene, and gave much-coveted sunglasses, to two groups of school students and adults – more than 100 people.



Team Onalaska with local church folks inside new Sicuani greenhouse walls they constructed during their mission trip.



Sampaya school students in their new sunglasses.

On our first day of work with the Onalaska folks, we were welcomed with an early, outdoor lunch -- bowls heaped with rice, potatoes, oka (a nutty-tasting local tuber), and fresh, fried trucha (trout from Lake Titicaca). The builders, including my son Sam, stayed at that site, where they laid adobe for the new greenhouse. The health care folks, Jeff and I moved on to a small school in Sampaya -- one teacher, one room, and 11 students, including several orphans or abandoned children; all from very poor families. We taught dental hygiene and distributed much coveted sunglasses, and school and dental-care supplies.

The local folks, who never receive a gift without reciprocating, surprised us with another lunch: fried trucha with all the trimmings.

The final stop that day was a school of 30 students in Santa Ana, about a third of them are “abandonados,” and roughly half are deeply impoverished. We were ushered into a classroom, where we were served our third, heaping lunch. Of course: fried trucha!



Santa Ana students receiving supplies

As you may know, adjusting to high elevation calls for eating lightly, especially during the first few days. But how could any of us refuse our welcome-and-thank-you lunches, bought and served at great sacrifice to our hosts? Despite valiant and creative efforts, such as sharing plates of food, discreetly slipping uneaten food to cats and dogs, and offering seconds and thirds to local folks and Sam, we all ate wayyyy toooo much. And, alas, seven of the Onalaska nine suffered from altitude sickness.

But what troupers they were! Local folks, and Jeff and I were dazzled! By Day Five the whole team was upright, energized, and thriving. The last few days were a delight for all of us. And bless them: they left us with a mound of new toothbrushes, tooth paste, a giant set of “choppers,” other teaching materials, clothing, medical supplies and a very much appreciated stock of goodies from the US including real Wisconsin Cheddar, pistachios and Smarties! We miss Team Onalaska, and hope to make a dash north to see them when we’re in the States for the holidays.

Again, a big Jikisiñkama (Great to see you!) to Team Onalaska!!!



Onalaska team members Susie and Tim along with local Promotore de Buena Salud Gumercinda teaching dental care in Santa Ana.



Above, Top and Left to Right: Team Onalaska members Tim, Susie, Sue and Jane teaching nutrition and dental hygiene to adults and kids in Santa Ana.

Welcome, Sam & Allyson!

Three weeks before Team Onalaska arrived, we met my son Sam, 20, at the La Paz airport. What a pleasure! Thanks to him, we no longer miss not having a 'fridge: we never have leftovers! He's been equally game to scale Horca del Inca (Gallows of the Inca, at 4,314 meters/14,230 feet) several times, make frequent runs in the spirit of altitude training, and learn the physically taxing arts of making and building with mud mortar and adobe blocks. He also helped coordinate the Onalaska construction gang, and tended to their ailing members.



Note the Chicago Bulls hat Allyson's friend has.



Sam working on Cusijata greenhouse.

Just five days before Team Onalaska landed, we welcomed Allyson Zeedrich, a graduate student in the School of Public Health at the University of Illinois at Chicago, who's interested in Global Health. Like Sam, Allyson will be with us until the end of July. She's fulfilling her practicum requirement here.

Lunch Bash for Abandonados

On Monday of this week, we met a missionary friend of ours, Carrie Blackburn Brown, founder and director of an orphanage in west-central Bolivia, along with her staff, and her family of 30 orphaned or abandoned children, ages 4 to 15. About eight years ago, Carrie, then in her early twenties, volunteered for three months at another orphanage at the southern tip of Lake Titicaca. She returned to the U.S., but soon felt called to return and work at the orphanage. When she showed up, she found the orphanage had been closed, and her only contact, Pastor Juan Paz, with whom Jeff and I now work, would be moving to a new, distant assignment the very next day.



Carrie (& us) with her kids and staff on vacation in Copa.

So Carrie marched into the bishop's office and volunteered to direct another orphanage. There were no such positions. But she was welcome to a church-owned piece of land at the base of Mount Illimani, which towers over La Paz at 21,900 feet. With the help of some college friends and money she'd raised in the States, Carrie bought building materials and she and her friends made the first shelter in what is now a compound featuring a school, dormitory, kitchen, and a farm.



Carrie and her kids heading down our street to their bus after lunch at Iglesia Nueva Jerusalem.

Every year, Carrie takes her charges on an explore-Bolivia vacation. Last year, she took them camping. This year, on Monday of this week, they took a bus to Copacabana. We greeted them with a hearty lunch we'd made and served at Iglesia Nueva Jerusalem along with a popular hot, sweet drink made with apple, cinnamon and semolina. Carrie and her gang spent the night at a Copa hostel. On Tuesday, Sam joined them for a boat ride out to Isla del Sol, where they spent two full days exploring the island's 80 Incan ruins and learning about the origins and legends of the Aymara culture.

Update on Projects

Here's a quick update on the good work donations are supporting. Please recall that all money-making projects require 20% community buy-in and a business plan showing how the project will sustain itself.

Sicuaní Greenhouse Nearly Completed



Thanks to Team Onalaska and an ambitious crew of community elders and residents, the adobe walls for a new, sustainable greenhouse are up and ready. The building will be roofed with durable plastic Agrofílm next week. Seedlings have already been started in 2-liter plastic bottles and will likely be planted in the greenhouse in about a week.

June 18: Giving thanks to Pacha Mama (Mother Earth) and groundbreaking ceremony for Sicuaní greenhouse.

New Greenhouse Roof Installed at Santa Ana



While Team Onalaska taught, community residents in Santa Ana installed a new, mission-sponsored Agrofил roof on a school greenhouse. The sun, which is so powerful that people cover car and truck tires to keep them from exploding, had destroyed the original plastic roof (Agrofил is more durable than plastic sheeting.)

Reinforcing roof structure prior to placement of new Agrofил.

Cusijata School Greenhouse Under Construction



Two weeks ago, school officials and local residents from Cusijata made adobe blocks. Sam joined them to help make mud mortar and build the walls. By next week, the mortar will have dried, and an Agrofил roof will be installed. Seedlings will soon be ready for transplantation.

Adobe Ready, Chicken Co-op Construction to Start



Over the last two weeks, church members churned mud with their feet to make 1,200 35-pound adobe blocks for a new, sustainable chicken co-operative. By next week, the blocks will be dry and ready for construction. The donated site is on a bluff with a fabulous view of Lake Titicaca. Hope the chicks like it!

42 Attend International Pastoral Training



Last week the mission sponsored a three-day, international pastoral training session that drew 42 participants, 16 of them from Peru. We brought in professors from La Paz and Lima, who taught basic theology as well as courses on preaching, church-based human service programs, and managing church business. These courses are especially important because virtually all churches here are led by lay pastors, who may be quite familiar with farming, shepherding, or carpentry, but have no training in church leadership.

Virtual Mission in Action: Dental Hygiene for 70+



We loved that the Onalaska team worked with mission-trained Promotores de Buena Salud (volunteer community public health workers) to teach nutrition and dental hygiene at several communities on the Copacabana Penninsula, as noted above. For us, it was a triple plus to carry donor Linda Kaste's Virtual Mission to completion. A few months ago she donated to sponsor a school-based dental hygiene teaching program. It's gratifying to know that Linda's gift benefited 70 young lives directly. And, when one considers family and community impact, she's probably touched more than 300 lives. Thanks, Linda!



Interested in helping? Let us know! We will gladly help you organize a visiting mission team, or a Virtual Mission Project, by sending photos, project descriptions, and more details!

And hey: we still need your favorite recipes for our upcoming fund-raiser, the Peru-Bolivia Lake Titicaca Border Mission Cookbook!

As always, thanks to all our donors, past and recent, and to the *many* people here and stateside who welcome, support, help, pray, extend patience, love us, and lift us up. Let us hear from you, amigos!

With love,
Debbie and Jeff