

## Trench, Drench, Quench

08.08.13



### Mission Team from North Augusta, SC

Thirteen pairs of fresh hands from Grace Church in North Augusta, South Carolina, worked with us July 22 through 25. Along with about 50 local folks, the team's construction crew trenched and laid a new 400-meter water line connecting a mountain springhead to a church construction site in Huacuyo Valley.



Others in the SC team taught vacation bible study classes to kids in Huacuyo, Copacabana, and Santa Ana, which is so remote none of the kids knew any Spanish – a local church leader translated to Aymara. They offered a sticker-art project, and a host of fun animal-based play, followed by a snack: animal crackers from the States!



Thanks Grace UMC, North Augusta, South Carolina!!







The team also bought and distributed 24 new children's coats and 100s of hand-made hats.

One team member left us cash to replace bent, uncushioned crutches used by Paulina, a woman who'd lost one of her legs 30 years ago to a post-accident infection. After a circuitous search in La Paz last week, Jeff found a new pair of sturdy, US-made aluminum crutches; he bought extra tips and grip pads. Although we've never heard her complain, judging from Paulina's blistered hands, she'll be overjoyed to have more comfortable, workable crutches to help her get around.

### Independence Day Flood of Tourists

*Bolivia*, the Lonely Planet travel guide, lists Bolivian Independence Day as one of the top ten festivals in Bolivia, and specifies it's "best in Copacabana" and is "characterized by pilgrimages, round-the-clock music, parades, brass bands, fireworks and amazing alcohol consumption." Copacabana's 8,000 residents made room for about 30,000 visitors, mostly from elsewhere in Bolivia, or Peru. Streets were so clogged with vendors, shoppers and drinkers that taxi drivers worked only the outskirts or not at all, and tourist buses loaded and unloaded at the edge of town. Jeff caught this (below) of one of the quirkier street hawkers selling horse fat. Our middle-aged friends told us it's meant to treat skin conditions. Their young adult offspring snickered and told us in English, presumably so their parents couldn't track, it's "for make hot man."



Proving the authenticity of the product, that's a horse head and an aborted colt tied to the cart.





The flood of tourists stretched our dangerously low water supply to the crisis point. Throughout the week the village trimmed evening residential power supply to 40 percent so there'd be enough juice to amplify all the visiting stage bands. Beer was sold from towering blocks of cases clustered along the streets. Copa's handful of public *baños* couldn't handle the inevitable outflow so side streets near the central plaza became reeking, open-air *baños*.

Still, it was fun to walk up into town, bump into friends and neighbors, watch a few performers, snack on cheese-filled fried yucca, Peruvian *churros* (slightly sweet fried dough stuffed with apple jelly), or skewers of grilled *anticucho* (cow heart), and then walk back to our blissfully uncrowded, quiet neighborhood.



### A (Barely) Salaried Job & 106 New English Students

Toward the end of Katie Yaun's first round of community English classes a pregnant woman showed up hoping Katie might agree to take over her August and September English classes at *Colegio Britanico*, Copa's only private school. If the teacher, Jhenny, couldn't find a replacement to cover her maternity "leave," she'd lose her job. But Katie's back in the States for August. So I offered to cover.

I shadowed Jhenny in late July. My first day, Aug. 1, classes were abruptly stopped so students could practice for the Independence Day parade. Despite its relatively small size, the school has a band, a battalion of flag bearers, and flag and baton twirlers. Even the youngest children, still round-cheeked like toddlers, learn to march: chin up, shoulders back, knees high, their brows puckered with concentration.

I teach six primary levels and six secondary levels. The largest class, fifth of primary, has 14 ten-year-old students. The smallest, sixth of secondary, has just two 17-year-olds. School isn't mandatory, and students often drop out to help at home or work a job.

One of my favorite classes, second of primary, has five seven-year-old girls. Like most of my classes, they are wild and undisciplined, hollering out "Teacher! Teacher! Teacher!" when they want my attention (pretty much always!). They leap from their seats, braid one another's hair,





stroke my hair, borrow and fetch pencils and erasers, and beg permission to use the bathroom. Through all that they are incredibly affectionate, and they are thirsty learners. On my first day, they spontaneously swarmed me with a group hug, nudging and pushing like puppies to get closest to me. Faculty, however, kept to the formal, cordial handshake and peck on the cheek greetings.

For teaching 4.5 hours four times a week, my monthly salary is 900 Bolivianos. That works out to about \$1.60 per hour, not counting lesson prep time. But already the rewards are measurable: my Spanish is improving, and I've been invited to sit in on Aymara language classes anytime on Wednesdays, my day off.

Day Two concluded with Copa's traditional night-time, candlelight, Independence Day parade, in which every Copa school marches. I lighted and re-lighted quite a lot of *Britanico* students' torches, circulated among the littlest kids trying to keep them, especially the bare-shouldered costumed ones, warm ... and won a new level of warmth from the staff.

At 8:00 a.m. Saturday, all students and staff were to convene at the school, then march to the formal daytime parade.

By 8:40 Saturday about a dozen students and six of about 15 faculty and staff were present. While we waited, the Aymara teacher,



Mercedes, gave me a lesson in pronouns and possessives. My already-treasured Aymara notebook is gaining new words, full pages, and greater value.

By 9:30 most everyone had showed up. Ten minutes later, we were finally on our way, students in their uniforms, faculty and staff in dove-gray suits, the women in black stilettos (example of typical female faculty shoes in photo at left) so high that on downhill slopes, their wearers had to walk backwards.

Even if I could buy a suit and pumps in my size, I couldn't justify the expense. Plus, at a foot taller than virtually every other teacher, I felt I'd look a freak in the parade. So I brought our good camera and announced that instead of marching, I'd take photos.





Wow! What a good call! Maybe thanks to the recently acquired sense of friendship and approval, the faculty and staff warmed and brightened. They asked for photos and posed. Some kids remained camera-shy or merely tolerant, but several noted the general OK from faculty and hammed it up. Many wanted group shots with their friends.



Especially in rural areas, Andeans believe photo-taking steals the subject's soul. They starchy shield children and animals less than a year old from camera lenses. The taboo eases somewhat with a subject's age, but most Andeans of any age dislike having their photo taken. They cover their faces and/or turn away ... unless of course, the photographer pays for a shot.

As time permits I'll pull the photos into an album for the school. Meanwhile, my mind is percolating day and night with ideas on how to engage my new students, have fun, and help them soak up English.



## Bishop Dyck's Visit

Jeff and I are keenly looking forward to the precious two days we'll have with our new Northern Illinois Conference bishop, Sally Dyck. She and her husband, along with Joyce and Oscar Carrasco, will arrive in Copa August 27. We hope to tour a few of the mission's green houses, the cuy farm, the new church construction site in Huacuyo, and perhaps a few other sites.



One of our great pleasures is telling our Aymara women friends, many of whom cannot write their own names, that our *obispa* – a woman! – is coming to visit them and their communities.

*Jallalla!* Hooray!





Please let us hear from you. We miss Midwestern cheese and sausage, running hot water and a functional shower, a washing machine, clean streets, and worship services in English. But mostly, we miss home, friends, and family. Send us a short email.

Please?

Deb and Jeff



**Yuspajara!**