CHRONICLE

INTERIM
IN
SERVICE-LEARNING
TO
BOLIVIA 1989

SERVICE-LEARNING IN BOLIVIA, SOUTH AMERICA, ~~1988~~ 1989

Group Chronicle

By

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Hell. Actually it wasn't hell; it was Yapacani, Bolivia, South America. But it was January, it was summer, it was hot, it was poor, it was dirty, and we were a group fresh from the luxurious life in the United States, so to us, Yapacani on that day in January seemed like hell. We had traveled for 24 hours to get there, leaving our friends, family, and culture in Birmingham at 1:30 p.m. on January 4, 1989, flying to Atlanta, then to Miami, and boarding Lloyd Aereo Boliviano for the flight through Panama City, Panama, to LaPaz and then Santa Cruz, Bolivia. The final leg of our trip was on what we called "the road from hell and to hell," a partially paved, mostly dirt, washed-out-in-places, bumpy, horrible road from Santa Cruz to Yapacani aboard a small "micro" bus with no shocks. What awaited us in Yapacani were crowded lodging, dirty bathrooms, cold showers, mosquitoes, poverty, strange foods, and strange people speaking Spanish. It seemed like hell.

Unlike hell, or perhaps like it, depending on your theology, we had chosen to go to Yapacani. "We" were 21 students from Birmingham-Southern College in Birmingham, Alabama, two faculty members from BSC, and three young adults, graduates of BSC, serving as adult advisors to the group. We had applied to, prepared to, and raised money to go to Yapacani as a part of a course during the BSC Interim Term, a project in

service and learning under the direction of the College Chaplain, Dr. Stewart Jackson. The other faculty member in charge of the project was Dr. Janie Spencer, an associate professor of Spanish. The students were Lisa Andrews, Barbara Baker, Laura Boyd, Carrie Cumbee, John Dunn, Lee Garrison, Melissa Godwin, Michael Johnston, Susan Kirby, Helen Krontiras, Ed Larson, Anne Mitchell, Chris Morgan, Kate Robertson, Molly Robertson, Brian Spencer, Amanda Terzin, Angela Weichman, Leigh Wilson, Hugh Yarborough, and Cinda York. The adult advisors were Brad and Amelia Spencer and Cyndi Duggan.

Our objectives for the experience were many. Each of us had wanted to go on the trip for different reasons, but some common goals included the wish to learn about a different culture, to be involved in significant service to others, and to develop close relationships with other people, both from our group and outside of it. Specifically, in the service part of the trip, we hoped to help the Methodist congregation of the Upper Room Church in Yapacani erect a church building. This would not only give them a place to meet but would also make them a more noticeable presence in their community. The other part of our service effort was to provide much-needed eye care, with eye exams and eyeglasses, to the people of Yapacani and the surrounding area. An optometrist from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Dr. Sara Alvarez, planned to join our group about a week after we arrived in order to give the eye exams and prescribe the glasses.

On our trip to Bolivia we took with us various tools to aid in the building of the church, medicines to give to the hospital in Yapacani, and over 1,000 pairs of eyeglasses donated through the UAB School of Optometry, individuals, and United Methodist churches in the North Alabama Conference.

The planning and preparation for this experience had been going on for about a year by the time we actually arrived in Bolivia. The previous spring, several of us applied for positions as officers for the trip. The officers included the Senior Project Officer, Brian Spencer; the Senior Medical Officer, Barbara Baker; the Senior Construction Officer, Michael Johnston; the Senior Worship Officer, Melissa Godwin; the Transportation Officer, Laura Boyd; the Treasurer, Lee Garrison; the Secretary, Kate Robertson; the Public Relations Officer, Chris Morgan; and the Historian, myself, Anne Mitchell.

After the officers had been chosen, applications for the rest of the team were distributed to interested students, and the selection of the team was made in May from the completed applications. In June, Stewart and his wife Robin traveled to Yapacani to get a feel for the area and to make arrangements for our living and working there. During the summer and fall, the team members worked on their own and together raising money for the trip and learning about Bolivia and the work we would be doing there.

Finally January arrived, and we set out on our long-

anticipated journey. The trip down was not exactly what we had expected. For one thing, we were delayed in Atlanta because the Eastern jet which was supposed to take us to Miami had a cracked windshield, and Eastern had to change our flight to another aircraft. Then, instead of flying us to Caracas, Venezuela and Manaos, Brazil, our Lloyd Aereo Boliviano 727 took us to Panama City and to LaPaz on our way to Santa Cruz. Nevertheless, we arrived safely in Santa Cruz at 8:00 a.m. Bolivia time (6:00 a.m. Birmingham time) January 5th.

Walt and Susie Henry and their daughter Janet, a Methodist missionary family living in Santa Cruz, met us at the airport. The Henrys have been in Bolivia about twenty years, working with various projects. Most recently, Walt has worked with the interdenominational Heifer Project, and Susie with nutritional education and women's groups. With the Henrys was a group of young people from a Methodist school at Montero, a city about 45 minutes from Santa Cruz. They had made a banner welcoming us and stood shyly holding it behind the glass outside the baggage claim area. After finding all of our baggage present, we moved easily through customs and loaded our things into two pickup trucks, one jeep, and one "micro" for our ride on the road to and from hell.

The road from Santa Cruz to Montero, which was on our way to Yapacani, was not from hell; it was paved. We stopped in Montero at the Methodist school, which had been founded by missionary Bob Caufield of the North Alabama Conference of the

United Methodist Church, and were given a tour of the school while Stewart called Robin to let her know we had arrived safely.

It was very hot.

The ride from Montero to Yapacani on the road to and from hell was far less pleasant than the flights to Santa Cruz and the ride to Montero had been. The distance between Santa Cruz and Yapacani is only about eighty miles, but the trip on this terrible road takes about three hours on a good day. January 5th was not a good day. About halfway to Yapacani, the driver of the "micro" noticed a problem with the front left wheel and debated going back to Montero for another bus. He decided against doing that and drove on VERY slowly toward Yapacani. Finally we reached a town where a sign in someone's yard advertised tire repair, and we pulled off. The driver got out, but we all stayed in the hot bus, not knowing what to do. Soon we realized that the bus was being jacked up...with all of us in it, but we just sat there anyway. A few of us ventured out to find the driver and another man lying under the bus working on the wheel. After waiting longer, more of us climbed out of the bus. After an hour or so, the men managed to fix the problem, and we started on our way again. About this time, the two trucks that had originally been with us but which had gotten ahead and gone on reappeared, having gotten Susie's call to Yapacani for help. About 45 minutes later, we all arrived in Yapacani, about four and a half hours after leaving Santa Cruz.

It was very hot, and we were thirsty.

In Yapacani, we were taken to the Casa Pastorale, a house owned by the Methodist church where half of our group would be staying. In addition to being a residence for some of the group, the Casa was also where all of us ate all our meals. It had been arranged for us to hire some of the women of the church to cook for us and do our laundry, and a meal was waiting for us when we arrived. This first meal consisted of chicken, vegetables, fried bananas, and lemonade made with boiled water.

After lunch, we waited. Some of us were going to be living about a five-minute walk away at Yapacani's nicest hotel (not as luxurious a place as the word "hotel" would connote), and we were a bit impatient to get there and set things up. But instead we waited. Why we were waiting was not altogether clear, but soon the word was passed that we were waiting so we could present the medicines we had brought to the doctor in charge of the Yapacani hospital and so we could be introduced to some of the church members who were there. At this gathering outside in the yard we had our first glimpse of the people who would become our friends over the next two weeks. The service of presentation involved long statements by Stewart and by the Bolivians, all of which were translated back and forth between English and Spanish by Janie. After all the presenting and welcoming, we went around and shook hands with the Yapacani people.

After the service, Hugh, one of our team members fluent in

Spanish, and Janie were interviewed by a woman from the local radio station. The station was to announce later about the medical services that would be available.

Finally, those of us staying at the hotel were taken to our new temporary home where we took cold showers or napped until suppertime.

Our living accomodations were crowded. The Casa had four sleeping rooms, each with at least three people in it, and the hotel had five rooms with three in each. We hung mosquito nets over the beds which made the rooms seem even more cramped. Most of the mattresses, except those of a lucky few, were made of straw and very uncomfortable. In the hotel, these mattresses were laid on about five wooden slats, each of which could easily be felt by the back, hips, and shoulders. To be comfortable, it was necessary to carefully position one's hips between two slats. Another problem that Stewart and Brian and others at the Casa suffered was that their mattresses were infested with bugs which bit them at night.

The hotel and the Casa had one indoor bathroom each. In the Casa, the shower, toilet, and sink were all in one room, while at the hotel, the shower was by itself with the toilet and sink in another small room. The Casa had, in addition to the indoor toilet, the outdoor "living toilet," as some liked to call it, in a wooden shed behind the house. The hotel had the benefit of an extra sink, the "trough" outside the door to the toilet. At the hotel, it was necessary to walk outside to get

to the bathroom facilities, which were around the back of the building. The shower at the hotel was infested with mosquitoes and had a nice view of the soccer field behind the hotel through a hole about a foot below eye level. Neither of the showers had hot water, and both had little water pressure. Despite the bugs, cold water, and lack of pressure, though, we all rushed to line up for the showers each day after work.

One thing that made the bathrooms less than pleasing was the fact that toilet paper cannot be flushed into the sewage system in Bolivia. This meant that all paper had to be discarded into a trash can or box next to the toilet. At the hotel, because the owner rarely emptied the trash or cleaned the bathroom, we took this job upon ourselves, and emptying the trash from the large trash can into the small pink garbage bags we had bought was the most dreaded job to the people whose turn it was to clean the bathroom.

Despite the primitive conditions of the hotel, we did have one luxury there--electric fans in each room. Even with these, the rooms, each having only one window and no cross ventilation, were almost unbearably hot at night.

After we settled into our rooms on that first Thursday, we went back to the Casa for supper about 7:30. Supper was actually served at 8:15 (in Latin America, things don't always occur right at the appointed time, as we learned). Supper was cheese empañadas (a type of pastry) and cake.

After supper, we were introduced to some of the officials

of the Upper Room Methodist Church and to the four women cooking for us. The Bolivians made more lengthy statements of welcome.

By 11:00 we were in bed, exhausted from the traveling and the events of the day.

We arose about 7:00 the next morning in order to be ready for breakfast at 8:00 at the Casa. After eating bread, rice pudding, and bananas with coffee or tea, we were told of our work assignments and were at work by 9:00.

At the construction site, we were divided into several groups for different tasks--laying bricks, mixing mortar, and building roof trusses. The Bolivians were well-prepared for our arrival, having used the money we had sent to buy the bricks, lumber, mortar and other supplies and to get it all to Yapacani before we arrived. The foundation of the church had already been laid, along with the corner bricks which would guide the walls. We started right away laying bricks and building the trusses. Before we had left Birmingham, Bill Whisenhunt of the BSC maintenance team had given some of us a lesson in bricklaying, but for most this was the first hands-on experience with this task. Lisa, Leigh, Susan, Molly, Stewart, Chris, Laura, Mike, Brian, Carrie, Eddie, Angela, Melissa, and Cinda learned quickly how to do everything relating to brick-laying, from carrying heavy bags of mortar mix to shoveling the sand and mortar mix together by hand to keeping the mortar at the right consistency to actually laying the bricks down.

More brick laying had to be done behind the church itself

for the small two-stall bathroom. Lisa, Leigh, and Susan worked on this structure for several days. It might not have taken so long to build this if they hadn't suffered the terrible setbacks of having an entire wall collapse twice. They overcame this hardship, however, and completed the "baño" at the end of the first week of work.

Those of us building the trusses--Brad, John, Kate, and I the first day--had some new skills to learn and some difficult, sometimes frustrating work, too. Each truss was built from four two-by-sixes about twelve feet long. These boards were made from dense, heavy wood, and were often warped from having been wet. All this made them difficult to manage and to fit together. To complete a truss, the four pieces had to be cut carefully in several places so they would all fit together snugly. Once they were made to fit, they were nailed and bolted together and secured at the apex with metal plates on each side. Four of us working together could complete about one and a half trusses per day, and nine trusses would be required altogether for the church.

One reason the work went so slowly was that we had only one power saw, one drill, and only one electrical outlet, located inside a small house next to the work site. So any work going on usually involved one person working and the other three holding boards still or watching. On the first day, Kate, John, and I had to learn to use the power saw, since none of us had ever worked much with one before. Fortunately, Brad had used

one, and he patiently showed us how it was done.

The medical team spent the first morning at the hospital unloading and inventorying the medicines we had brought and touring the hospital facilities. The hospital was fairly small, with a couple of examining rooms, a dispensary, a waiting room, and several rooms for patients in the back, but it was clean and pleasant. On Monday, the medical team planned to begin giving preliminary eye screenings to the people who came for this in response to hearing the news of eye care availability on the radio.

Lunch time in Yapacani came at about 12:30, and on the first work day we had beans, onions, and beets mixed in a salad, hamburgers made with fatty beef, and fried potatoes. After lunch was the time for rest, the siesta, until 2:30, when we returned to work. We all became very fond of the siesta.

In the afternoon of that Friday, the construction team continued its work while the medical team went out with the Henrys to a nearby river for wading. On the way there in the back of Walt's truck, they picked up several Bolivian people waiting along the roadside and dropped them off at various places. One of the people they picked up was an assistant to the local doctor, a person with about six months' medical training who can tell at least if a sick person needs to be sent to the Yapacani hospital for more attention. If a person sent to Yapacani needs surgery, he or she has to go to Montero, because no surgery is done in Yapacani. This man explained this

medical system to the group, and then took them to his home where, by the way, he had his own coca patch.

While on this trip, the group also learned that they were near one of the biggest coca-growing areas in the country located in an area which has plentiful rainfall and where there is an airstrip used in the drug trade. They tried to visit one coca plantation owned by someone the Henrys knew, but the owner was not home.

Also they learned about the ecological problems being caused by the Bolivians' cutting down of their rain forests.

They returned to Yapacani about 5:30 p.m.

Dinner that evening included a type of macaroni and cheese, a carrot and peanut salad, jello, and delicious sugar cookies. After supper, we sat around the Casa and sang songs while Stewart played his guitar and then had a little time of reflection which Melissa led. She asked people to give one word describing their feelings about the trip thus far. All the terms given were positive, things like "eye-opening," "cooperation," "encouraging," and "learning."

Saturday, January 7 began a bit earlier than Friday had, with breakfast at 7:00 rather than at 8:00. We were at the construction site by 8:30. Everyone, including the medical team, worked on the church that day since the medical work would not begin until Monday. Work continued much as the day before, with all of us becoming a bit more confident about our ability to do our jobs. It rained on and off all afternoon, so work

proceeded at a slower pace. The medical team left the construction team in the afternoon to go back to the Casa to practice the eye screenings they would be giving on the women cooking and washing for us.

In the evening after dinner, everyone went to the hotel where we sat in the breezeway and sang songs with "Estewart," as his Spanish name was, until someone suggested that we tell a story. This story was begun by one person, and each person in the circle added a few lines to it as we went on. It was a story of a man named Eddie, his mother, three Oriental men named Ying, Yong, and Yang, hotels, Depend undergarments, and men named John Smith.

That night as we slept it rained buckets and buckets constantly into Sunday morning. There was supposed to be a church service of the Upper Room congregation at the Casa, but because of the rain none of the members could come. So after our breakfast of bread, cheese, apples and peanut butter (brought from home), we had our own small service of songs, prayers, and a story about a grandfather on a mountain who saved his community. After this, one of our hosts, a minister named Simón who is the Methodist district finance officer based in Montero, spoke to us at length about the Methodist Church in Bolivia.

The first missionaries went to Bolivia in 1906, beginning their work in the mountainous areas of the country near LaPaz with the Aymara Indians. Because the work began among the

Aymara, the work among the Quetchua peoples of the lower areas (like Yapacani) is not as far along as that with the Aymara. By the late 1960's and early 1970's, the church in Bolivia began to wish for autonomy and finally achieved it. There are problems, however, particularly with a shortage of trained persons, especially ordained pastors, to provide leadership. Because of this shortage, the church relies heavily on lay persons to do its work and is thus a very democratic church. The lack of trained leadership meant that the Bolivian church was not really ready for autonomy when it became independent, according to Simón. The problem of providing trained leadership is being helped, however, by institutions such as the Methodist seminary in Montero, where he was trained.

Simón commented that the Methodist Church in Bolivia has identified itself with the poor and with the masses.

One among our group asked Simón about the cocaine problem as it relates to Bolivia. He responded that this problem is not the fault of the Bolivian people; rather the problem has been caused by forces outside Bolivia, and from outside the solution must come. Coca growing itself is not the cause of the problem, for it is simply one of the traditional crops grown in the country. Some people are drawn into the coca trade because they are desperately poor and need the money they can earn to survive. Simón added that some of the programs designed to stop coca production, such as giving money to people to get them to stop producing, only lead to more production of coca.

Simón spoke to us in Spanish, and Walt Henry translated his thoughts into English.

After these activities of the morning, we had some free time until lunch (potatoes, peas, and carrots mixed and beef and bread) was served at 1:30.

After lunch the skies cleared somewhat, and a group went with the Henrys and some of the church people to a nearby river, where Hugh was attacked by a herd of ants. Some of those who stayed home went into the Yapacani marketplace to buy some cleaning supplies for the filthy hotel bathroom. Everything from electronics to food to bicycle tires to batteries to clothes to medicines to coca leaves and witchcraft items was sold in the market. Most of the salespeople had their wares in semi-permanent open structures covered with a piece of tin held up by a couple of poles. The dirt road running through the market had been turned to mud by the rain the night before, and walking through the market that Sunday was a treacherous thing. A little later when Susie returned from the river, she took us back into the market to purchase aguayos, the colorful shawls many of the local women used to carry their belongings or their babies.

Dinner Sunday night was corn, tomatoes, cake, and hot chocolate. After dinner, our group gathered with the families of the church at the hotel for singing (especially singing of our "favorite" song--the only song we knew in Spanish--"Demos Gracias Al Señor") and for meeting each other. All of us stood

up and introduced ourselves one by one to them in Spanish. This was quite a feat for some of us who weren't Spanish scholars, and it sometimes proved amusing, as when Brad announced that he was a contadora (the a on the end of this word denotes a female accountant). After we introduced ourselves, each family in the church introduced all its members. The church consisted of perhaps five or six families, but each family was large and included several generations, so the congregation was larger than it might sound.

After the introductions, one of us asked the Bolivians what their views of the United States were. Responses to this question included the perceptions that the USA has no poor people, that the USA as a nation helps only the better-off nations of the world, and that the Reagan administration had little compassion for the poor.

The next morning we found out that Mondays in Bolivia are the same as Mondays in the United States--bad. Nothing seemed to go right. We awoke to find that the water all over town was off; it had not been turned back on in the morning as it usually was. The water situation in Yapacani was a little awkward anyway, because as a rationing measure, the water in town was always turned off for the night at about 7:00 p.m. and usually turned back on about 6:00 the next morning. This was not the case this morning, though, and the lack of water meant no showers and no flushing away the accumulation in the toilet from the night before.

Breakfast was served without much incident, including bread, jam, peanut butter, and oatmeal. Lunch, a meat and vegetable stew over rice and a lettuce salad, was, however, late.

Monday at the construction site was extremely frustrating. On the previous Friday and Saturday, we had been making the pieces for the trusses by doing several of one piece at a time and had made the assumption that if we did them all by the model, they would fit together after we had made all of them. When we began on Monday, Don Ari (Aristides Montero, the Bolivian brick mason who was in charge of the construction) wanted us to start fitting some of the pieces together into complete trusses. When we tried to do this with the pieces we had made already, they did not fit well enough because of the warpage of the wood from the rain, among other things. Don Ari was very patient with us, however, spending much of the morning with Kate, Brian, John, and me helping us alter each piece slightly to make them fit. By the end of the afternoon, things were looking up because we had four complete trusses fitted together.

At the hospital, the medical team gave preliminary eye screenings including tests for near and far vision and colorblindness to about seventy people. Those with bad vision were given appointments to see Sara the following week.

Dinner that Monday was also late, but it was good: tuna noodle casserole with peas, fresh pineapple, and cookies. The

evening activities were once again at the hotel with one of the main features being Walt's slideshow with pictures of the Heifer Project's work in Bolivia. The Heifer Project gives chickens and cows to families who need them. The families sign a contract agreeing to pay for the animals by giving the first offspring or eggs back to the project. Over 3500 families have been helped by the project in Bolivia. Susie also talked about her work trying to teach people about better nutrition, something that is especially needed since malnutrition is a major factor in the country's 20 to 25% infant mortality rate.

After the Henrys' presentation, some of the men of the church who had been pioneers in the settlement of the Yapacani community came forward to tell us their stories.

The first to speak was Simón Gandarillas, a dear older man to whom all of us became very attached as we worked with him at the construction site. We knew him as "Don Simón." ("Don" is a title of respect in Spanish.) He went to Yapacani in 1961 when it was not Yapacani but only jungle. This was when the very first colonizers were going into the area. Two or three months before he went there, the area was under the Bolivian government's development association, and an army unit was stationed there. The place has been called a "commando" ever since. The army had its own farmland. Three months before Don Simón went, the jungle Indians who inhabited the area had shot a soldier with a bow and arrow. Not only were there the dangers posed by the Indians in the area, there were also wild animals

there. It was a "jungle out there," literally.

When he went into the Yapacani area, travel was very difficult for there was no real road. Many families, like his, went to the area without many resources and had to hunt and fish for their food since they could not go to a city for supplies. When he went, there were only a few people there, and "civilization" ended four miles down the road. By 1963 more people arrived in Yapacani and populated the areas farther out, and at this time also Wendell Cramer and others began the Methodist activity in the area. The Methodists took a pre-fabricated house there, put it up on church-owned land, and sent in the first pastor.

It was difficult to get the army to provide space in the area for a market and a town. The army never thought a town would grow up there at all; rather, they expected that everyone would live out on the land. The Institute of Colonization was formed by the Bolivian government in those years and took over the settling of the area. This group, like the army, did not really want a town in the area, but soon it realized that a town was needed to provide a market for the farmers' goods and to provide services such as schooling for children. Also, as agricultural production, especially of rice, increased, a place was needed to process the rice. Yapacani became a center for people from the outlying areas to obtain the things they needed, and the town developed.

After Don Simón finished, Gregorio Garcia, Don Gregorio to

us, began to speak. We will remember Don Gregorio as a small man who rode his bicycle to the market daily to buy the food for our meals. He went to Yapacani a little before Don Simon went, arriving on July 13, 1961 when he was 22 years old. He is now fifty years old. When he first went, the settlement was about three kilometers down the road from where it is now. He first hoped to get some land on the other side of the river, but water was difficult to obtain there, having to be drawn up by hand from a well. To compound problems there, he found while he waited to get the land that the mosquitoes were terrible in that spot. Some of his family was already in the Yapacani area, and they encouraged him to get some land at kilometer ten, which is where he lives today. (Yapacani is at kilometer four.) The water supply at kilometer ten was better, and the mosquitoes fewer than in the area where he had originally gone. It was not easy to decide where to settle in those early days, though. All that was in the area was a small strip cleared for the road. Otherwise it was all tall trees and open land for the choosing.

He cleared the jungle on his land, and other families joined him there. They banded together and supported each other, being "all of the same class" and having all come to Yapacani from the same area. In the early days, regionalism caused conflict among people colonizing the area, so this was a reason for these families' banding together. As the years have passed, however, everyone has learned to live together better.

He ended by saying that this was his history, although

there was much more he could tell.

Candido Mareño spoke next. We did not get to know him as well as we did others, but those of us working at the hospital remember that he is one of the church members whom we were able to fit with eyeglasses. He went to Yapacani on August 26, 1961 with three children and two other men, including church member Lucio Vanegas. Yapacani was at that time "a place of terror." Much vacant land was available in Yapacani, but the three went further out to settle because they had each other. They were all from the same province and understood one another.

The first year, there was only a little strip of clearing to walk to the land. He farmed one hectare of rice, but forest animals ate it all before he could even harvest it. This made the first year very hard, but they planted yuca (a potato-like vegetable) and palm trees and had enough food to eat.

He was able to plant four hectares of rice the second year. Once again, mice destroyed much of the crop, but he was able that year to harvest one-forth of what he had planted.

He and the others hunted game in the forest to supplement their food supply. Twice, neighbors of his were attacked by tigers.

In the early days, Mareño noted, as had Don Simón, no one expected a town to form at Yapacani, and those in charge of colonization had not thought ahead about the peoples' need for care of the sick and for education. For a time the only medical treatment available was from a man who had only the training of

a nurse's aide, and he finally stopped seeing sick people.

Bugs were a terrible problem in the area in the early years, too. The cooks had to use smoke to keep the mosquitoes away. No one then, Mareño said, expected Yapacani to be the "paradise" it is now where there are "no bugs."

This statement brought some muffled chuckles from our group. Even if this wasn't hell, it certainly wasn't paradise, and we thought the bugs were terrible. Many of us had innumerable mosquito bites on our legs.

We thought the meeting was almost over, but Mareño thought of more to say and continued. Some people who come to Yapacani, he said, look at the people and think they have not progressed at all. But those people do not realize the hardships the people in Yapacani have overcome, the dangers many faced when they went to Yapacani and cut down the forest. For one thing, many people were killed by falling trees as they were trying to clear the land. Other dangers included fires, which damaged many homes over the years. The thatch roofs of many dwellings made them especially susceptible to fire.

Walt asked the three men about the long- and short-term security they felt for their families in Yapacani. Don Simon said that in spite of the fact that he has lived and worked there since 1961, he does not feel he or his family have progressed very much. They faced many problems there. For one thing, his family grew. Also, he went to Yapacani's tropical climate from a drier, more temperate area, and he and his family

have suffered from the change in climate as well as from diseases. He personally has had a difficult time, enduring the deaths of his first and second wives, two children, and his mother since he has been in Yapacani. He sees a dim future for himself, and this thought weighs heavily on him. Also, he added that one reason he has been unable to get ahead in life is that he has tried to live an honest life. Those who have gotten ahead there, he said, have done it by taking advantage of other people. The commercial people have benefitted most. There were opportunities for him to get involved in illicit activities, but he and his family have tried to avoid these and to live honest lives. Although the narcotics trade is rampant in the area and many people have become involved in it out of their need, he and his family have tried to avoid it. Living honestly is for them a main principle of their lives which they could not bring themselves to violate, even if it meant remaining poor.

Mareño added that the people of Yapacani are not poor because they have not produced anything. On the contrary, they have produced an abundance of rice there. The problem is that they must sell their rice to buyers there at a cheap rate, and the intermediaries end up making great amounts of money while they, the producers, get hardly anything. The intermediaries exploit both the producers and consumers, and this keeps many of the people of Yapacani poor.

Another man, Teodardo Gandarillas, a son of Don Simón, began to speak to us then. Teodardo is the president of the

Methodist church in Yapacani, and he worked with us on the construction site. We had a terrible time getting his name right, trying several times to call him Teodoro, which sounds like the words meaning "I love you" in Spanish. In addition to being president of the church, Teodardo has also worked with the Heifer Project.

He went to Yapacani as a little boy. Before his family moved there, they had lived in a city, where Teodardo had been able to go to school and where he had had many friends. When his father told him they were going to move to Yapacani, he was initially happy, thinking that Yapacani was a town with many fun things to do. Upon his arrival there, however, he found something much different than what he had hoped for and expected; Yapacani was a jungle with a narrow path through it. He was thankful at least that his family had a shotgun, because he could hunt to entertain himself. When he was thirteen, he met some other people and was able to walk to other towns far away to play football.

The Bolivian Institute of Colonization was in charge of the settlement of Yapacani. According to Teodardo, this organization went into the area, building nice offices for their employees but failing to give the colonists an adequate orientation to the area. Many people went to Yapacani from other areas and did not know the culture there, nor how to eat, to take care of themselves, to use tools, to cut trees or to do any of the things they needed to do to survive in Yapacani, and

there was no one to teach them these things. This is why many people who went out to work never came back alive; they were killed by falling trees, or snakes, or other hazards.

Teodardo also resents the Institute of Colonization because they brought in too many colonists before the roads and other facilities were set up, meaning the people had no way to get their products out to be sold. Thus, much of their work was in vain. Furthermore, the Institute made the colonists cut down large areas of the forest. If the colonists did not comply with this directive, the Institute threatened to take their land away, so most people went along with it. This deforestation destroyed many natural resources and made the area very susceptible to erosion, flooding, and fires.

Teodardo ended his reflections by recounting one of his most vivid memories of the early years in Yapacani, his memory of the rats. They were so bad, he said, that his family dug a trench around their house to catch them, and that about one thousand were caught each night for two nights or more.

On this note, the meeting ended. Melissa, Brad, Amelia, Kate, Carrie, Stewart, Leigh, and I stayed in the breezeway talking for awhile and then went on to bed.

Tuesday morning, January 10 was frustrating for many of us on the construction site. The power went off, so progress on drilling the holes for the bolts in the trusses ceased. Brian and John continued cutting wood, but Kate and I moved over to the brick-laying. I mixed mortar for Carrie and Laura to use

laying bricks. The brick workers had become frustrated in the preceding days because Don Ari's brother, Don Pepe, also a brick mason, had joined him to help with the work and had criticized much of the work they had done, even making them take down some parts of it. Some members of the team were also finding it frustrating that there was not always enough work for everyone to have something to do, and those not getting to work felt helpless just standing around.

The medical team gave preliminary tests to 45 more people that morning, and by noon had made over 100 appointments for Sara for the next week.

Cinda, Eddie, Chris, and Mike had a different experience that Tuesday morning. They went out to the home of Lucio Vanegas, one of the church members who had been helping with the building, to help him catch up on some of the work he had been unable to do since he was at the construction site. They planned to help him repair the roof on his storage shed, which had fallen off the center beam. The roof was in worse condition than Don Lucio thought, however, because when they all began to push it back up, the entire roof collapsed, having been invaded by termites. Don Lucio did not have the materials needed to rebuild it, so the group returned to the construction site.

Lunch was served late because the power and the water had been off much of the morning. This meal consisted of chicken and gravy over rice, potatoes, freeze-dried potatoes with

peanuts, and a peach drink with a peach pit in it.

The afternoon was sunny and almost unbearably hot, but this did mean that finally much of our laundry which had been washed Friday or Saturday got dry. At the construction site, Brad, Eddie, and Chris went with Teodardo in his vehicle, what we might loosely call a truck, to get the first load of dirt for the packed-earth floor for the church. They shoveled the dirt into and out of the back of the truck by hand. This was the first of several loads to come, and the shoveling was one of the most strenuous, difficult, and dreaded jobs on the construction site by the end of our time there.

Progress on the walls of the church continued steadily. In fact, the wall on the back of the church was high enough that scaffolding had been erected to continue it. This scaffolding, interestingly, was propped on the existing wall, and we wondered how they would be able to build the rest of the wall around these boards holding the scaffolding up. They simply left holes in the wall at these points and went on up.

By the end of the afternoon, the trusses were moving along well, too, with four completed and the boards cut for the fifth one.

Forty-five more people got eye tests at the hospital that afternoon, and Helen found two among them who were color blind.

We were served delicious cheese empañadas that evening for dinner along with some very thick chocolate pudding. That day, Don Ari's daughter, Ruth Montero, had come to Yapacani to take

charge of the cooking, taking the place of Doña Ana who had been in charge up until that point. Apparently, we had some disagreement with Doña Ana about the fee we would pay her to do the cooking, and it had been decided that we would have to get someone else. Ruth had spent several years in the United States obtaining a nursing degree from a university in Tennessee and spoke English. We came to be very fond of her.

After dinner, we had a brief team meeting at which it was announced that we would go into Santa Cruz to spend Saturday night for a little break for everyone. After this meeting, we were thrilled to have our first free evening of the trip. We spent it reading, writing, playing cards, and discussing issues raised by The Book of Questions. This discussion, going on at the hotel, became rather heated over some issues like abortion.

Thus went our first week in "paradise."

Our second week began with sickness. Wednesday, January 11, dawned to find Laura suffering fever and chills. The night before, Hugh was taken sick with the same symptoms, and Mike began having problems with stomach cramps. Mike and Laura managed to work on Wednesday despite their sickness. That morning, John, Kate, Don Ari, and I worked on the trusses, completing the fifth one and beginning the sixth. Using the wrong transformer to convert the current for the power saw, we melted the three-to-two prong adapter we were using.

The walls for the church continued to go up, and another load of dirt for the floor arrived. The team shoveled this load

directly from the truck into the church and began to spread it around the floor. The dirt that had been unloaded the day before had been shoveled out in a pile on the ground several yards away from the church, so this entire pile had to be brought over to the church by wheelbarrow. This not being the most appealing task, the group made it into an olympic sport, competing to see who could run the wheelbarrow up the ramp over the wall and dump the dirt the fastest. Those who weren't running judged the runner's form and speed.

At the hospital, many more people came who had not come before and wanted to be seen. But the team had already signed up 300 people, the most Sara could possibly see, and they had to turn many people away. According to Lee, this "nearly led to a riot," but the nurse at the hospital, Rosemary, took charge, shouting to the noisy crowd that she would take who she wanted to and that would be it.

Lunch Wednesday was mashed potatoes, meat, cucumbers, onions, tomatoes, and pineapple and banana mixed together. To our delight, it was within ten minutes of being on time.

After lunch, we took our siesta until 2:30 and were back to work by 2:45. The afternoon was unbearably hot once again, but we continued to work. We stopped early at 4:30 because a group of youth from the Methodist church in Montero was coming to spend the evening with us. Many of us were less than enthusiastic about another evening activity, and, to make things worse, we were very tired. We met the group of twenty or more

at the Casa Pastorale, and before dinner, we all played volleyball in a field nearby. After volleyball, we ate supper together at the Casa, and afterwards some of the boys played music for us in the Casa yard with a guitar, a charrango (small instrument similar to a mandolin), and a small flute. "La Bamba" was the one song familiar to us which they played.

After the music, we all went to the hotel for more songs and games. The youth leader from the Montero group had planned several activities to get our groups to mix with each other without requiring much speaking, which would have been difficult because of the language barrier. The games included a pass the hat game similar to musical chairs. The person holding the hat when the music stopped had to give something of his or hers to the leader. After several things had been collected, the people from whom they had been gotten had to do whatever Georges, one of the youth group leaders, said. I had to dance in the middle of the circle in front of everyone with one of the boys from their group. Cyndi had to choose a husband without seeing him and then have a small marriage ceremony with him. John had to be kissed on the cheek by one of the girls. Other games got more people--Barbara, Susan, Hugh, Brian, Brad, and Stewart among them--to dance around in the circle with various partners. Even though we had not been that excited about it earlier, we all ended up enjoying the evening laughing at our friends and getting to know the group from Montero.

Before the group left about 10:00 for the two-hour ride

down the road from hell to Montero, Georges, who spoke English, gave a touching farewell saying that they loved us in Jesus Christ despite all national, cultural, racial, and other barriers.

Thursday morning, January 12, Laura was still sick, vomiting now, and Eddie had gotten sick during the night.

At the construction site, Mike, Kate, and I worked on the trusses, completing the sixth one and beginning drilling holes in the steel plates which would secure the trusses at their apexes. Meanwhile, Angela and Brian reached the top of the wall at the back of the church, and Melissa, Stewart, Brad, Amelia, and others shoveled mort dirt from the truck into the floor of the church. John and Susan mixed mortar for the bricklayers.

Lunch was meat stew with peas over rice, bananas, carrot salad, and refresco (a fruity drink like Kool-Aid).

Once again the afternoon was extremely hot, and the construction site we had to stop work every fifteen minutes for water. The water was very precious to us. Because the water supply in Yapacani is not pure, the women cooking for us boiled water every day and kept it in big buckets in the freezer so we could keep our water bottles full. The water was clean and clear, and we were thankful for it.

At the hospital that Thursday, Yapacani's Catholic priest visited the team to see the work going on and offered to announce about what they were doing at mass that night or on Sunday. Already having more people than they could handle,

however, the medical team had to ask him not to do that.

After work and showers, we ate macaroni and cheese, potatoes with peanut sauce, carrot salad, and jello with bananas for supper and then went to the hotel for singing with Stewart and a game with Melissa. In the game, each of us brought a T-shirt, put it in a big bag with the others, then drew one out of the bag. Then each person had to talk to the person whose shirt he or she had and find out the person's reasons for coming on the trip. We then shared this information with the group.

Friday at last, January 13, the day before we would go back to "civilization" in Santa Cruz for 24 hours...finally came. Breakfast of crepe-like pancakes, bread and watermellon was a pleasant surprise. At the construction site, Don Simón's granddaughter Marta from Santa Cruz helped us some with the trusses. I spent the morning observing the work going on at the hospital to get a better feel for what the medical team was doing. All week they had been doing the preliminary eye tests and making an information sheet on each patient for Sara to use as a reference. Early in the week, they had taken names and made a list for these screenings, so each morning when they came in, they called the names on the list first. If some of them did not come, the team saw people who had not gotten on the list but who had come anyway. Rosemary, the nurse, called people in one at a time. First, the patient went to Lee, who took his or her name and asked several questions. Then Helen did a test for color blindness. After this, the patient moved to another room

where Hugh ("El Joven") and Cyndi gave distance-vision tests while Barbara ("Vanna") held the E cards used for this test. Amanda tested each person for near vision and checked them for crossed eyes, and finally those who needed to come back to see Sara (most of them) went to Janie to get an appointment time. As of that Friday, January 13 at 10:30 a.m., the team had screened 370 people and made about 300 appointments for Sara, one every five minutes for four days the next week.

Most of the people went through all the tests easily, but some had difficulty understanding what they needed to do for each test. The difficulty was compounded when people came who spoke only the Indian language, Quetchua. Then, one of our team who spoke good Spanish had to give the instructions to one of the nurses who spoke Quetchua and have her translate them for the patient.

Lunch on Friday was potatoes, yuca, fish, and a banana and milk drink.

There was not much for the bricklayers to do Friday afternoon at the construction site because the walls on three sides were too high to reach from the ground, and because scaffolding had only been constructed on one wall. So most of the construction team spent the afternoon in a line moving a big pile of bricks from one place to another. Those working on the wood completed the seventh truss.

The medical team spent the afternoon doing the last 35 screenings. To their surprise, there was no riot when they

announced to the people that no more could be seen. Hugh experienced some frustration when he told a woman to be sure to cover her eye completely and she snapped back at him in Spanish, "It IS covered!"

For dinner that evening, we were served one of the oddest dishes of the whole trip: lettuce pancakes. This delicacy was complemented with rice and meat, tomatoes, papaya, and lemon pudding. After dinner, we had a surprise birthday party for Brian, who turned 22 that day. There was cake, Double Cola, and even a group of musicians playing traditional music, including the ever popular "La Bamba," and "El Condor Pasa" (better known to us as "I'd Rather Be a Sparrow than a Snail, If I Could" by Simon and Garfunkel) with guitar, charrango, flutes, and drum. We danced to their music in the Casa yard.

Another big event this Friday was the naming of a baby. The baby belonged to Rosa, one of the women cooking for us, and was five months old but unnamed. Rosa and Janie had become friends, and Rosa had asked Janie to name the child, giving her a week to think about it. Janie chose "Helena Amelia" in honor of Helen and Amelia.

Saturday, January 14 was a big day since we were going into Santa Cruz. We arose at 6:00, and those of us living at the hotel moved all our things to the Casa for safe-keeping before breakfast. Janie and Ruth arranged for us to "charter" a micro from the place where the micros picked up people in Yapacani, and the old, dilapidated, red, white, and blue mini-school bus

came and picked us up at the Casa. Since the busses hold about twenty people comfortably, we had planned to pay for two of them, but it turned out that even if we had paid for all the seats in two busses, the busses would still have stopped to pick up people to fill the empty seats. Not wanting to ride with farm animals, which Bolivians commonly bring on busses, the twenty-five of us (everyone except Stewart, who elected to stay in Yapacani) piled into the one micro for the ride down the road from hell. The ride this time was much easier and much faster than it had been the week before because we had no trouble with the bus. It only took about two hours to reach Montero and the paved road. In Montero, we changed to a newer, nicer Toyota micro for the last part of the trip. It was interesting to see, on the way into Santa Cruz, a farmer herding his cattle down the highway. We had to swerve to avoid hitting them.

It was also interesting to note the driving rules for intersections in Santa Cruz and Montero. There are no stop signs or traffic lights to regulate traffic flow. Cars (or busses) approaching an intersection honk their horns and barrel on through the intersection if they do not hear another horn or see another car. If many cars are coming into the intersection, it works something like a four-way stop. It is made a bit easier by the fact that all the streets are one-way, so cars are only coming from two directions at once. Still, the driver's view is blocked by buildings at every intersection, so driving is risky. According to Susie, though, accidents increased when

the city tried to install traffic lights because people were not accustomed to that system.

Upon arrival in Santa Cruz, we were taken to the Tropical Inn Hotel, to us, the lap of luxury. The rooms were paneled in dark wood with a wood floor and had two COMFORTABLE single beds, AIR CONDITIONING, TELEPHONES, TELEVISION, MIRRORS, and PRIVATE BATHS with HOT water. We were in heaven! Civilization! The first thing some of us did was buy candy.

After settling in and changing American dollars for bolivianos, we went to eat lunch. Several of us stopped at the Bonanza, a small hamburger restaurant. We had rushed off without thinking to bring a Spanish-speaker with us, but we managed to place orders. Fortunately, Kate and Cinda, both of whom spoke good Spanish, arrived a few minutes later. We needed them when the time came to settle the check.

After lunch, several of us whom some would say had been "pining" for our boyfriends, placed calls from our rooms at the hotel to the United States. To do this, we had to call the front desk, give the number we wanted to call, and wait thirty or forty minutes while the desk clerk called LaPaz to get an international line. Barbara called her fiancé Wesley Crane, Melissa called Matthew Penfield, Leigh called Guy Chauncey, and I called David Coe (and my father). These calls were not cheap. Barbara spent $66 talking to Wesley for fourteen minutes, and I spent $55 talking to my father and David for about thirteen minutes. I think we all thought the calls were worth the cost,

however.

Sara arrived in Santa Cruz that Saturday, having just flown in from Birmingham. The Henrys met her at the airport and brought her to the hotel.

Later in the afternoon, Hugh, Cyndi, Angela, Cinda, Eddie, Amanda, Kate, Janie, Mike, Sara, and I went with the Henrys and a friend of theirs to a nearby river where there is food and live music on Saturdays. We sampled various pastries--empañadas, sonso, and tamales--many of which were made with cheese, and Sara, Janie, Eddie, Hugh, and Cyndi danced to the music of one of the bands.

For dinner, the entire group went to a good restaurant that served a variety of food from American to Chinese. There was one little incident during dinner where Leigh, and later Laura, went to the restroom and, when searching for the lever to flush, pulled a lever for the shower instead, getting slightly soaked in the process. Otherwise we all had a good time. After dinner, several, led by Hugh, went in search of dancing, while a few of us went back to the hotel to rest.

Meanwhile, back in Yapacani, Stewart and the church men worked on the church that day. In the evening, Stewart heard from one of the cooks that some people were planning to come and steal from our things that night. Paulo, the brother of Valentina and Juana, the women doing our laundry, came to the Casa to be Stewart's bodyguard. They sat up talking and then both spent a quiet night in the Casa.

Sunday morning, Kate and I arose and took the first warm showers we had had in eleven days. Others had already experienced this bliss the day before. Some people ate breakfast at the hotel, while about eight of us went to meet the Henrys for morning worship at the Iglesia Evangelica Methodista several blocks away. About a hundred people were crammed in a medium-sized room for the service. Not having allowed quite enough time for the walk to the church, we arrived a little late, and squeezed into the seats around the congregation. The service lasted an hour and 45 minutes, including singing, a children's choir accompanied by guitar, and a sermon most of us did not understand much of. But the people were very friendly to us, particularly one large woman sitting next to Amelia who took Amelia under her wing, showing her where the scripture readings and hymns were at every turn.

After the service, we rushed back to the hotel. Originally, we had planned to set out for Yapacani at 3:00, but the skies were threatening rain, so we changed the time to 1:00. With all those people counting on the medical team and the doctor to be there at 8:00 on Monday morning, we could not afford to get stranded in Santa Cruz because the dirt road was made impassable by the rain. We got a nice micro, and the driver agreed to take us all the way to Yapacani in it. Although the rain was starting and we had to drive through big puddles in one section of the road, we made it safely to Yapacani about 4:00. When we arrived, Stewart was not at the

Casa, having gone to play basketball with some of the youth.

Spaghetti, salad, and cake were waiting for us for dinner.

After dinner, the construction team walked to the site to see what had been done at the church, while the medical team, of which Kate, Angela, Eddie, and I were now members, met with Sara to be briefed on the things we would be doing in the next week. In about an hour, we learned how to test eyes for drainage angles, how to put drops in, how to read eyeglasses prescriptions, how to find a prescription among our donated glasses to more or less match the prescription she would write down, and how to fit glasses to someone's face. We were not sure we were really ready to do all these things, but Sara assured us we were and sent us to bed.

It rained hard all night long and into the morning. The rain was loud pounding on the asbestos roof of the hotel.

Despite some anxiety and dread on the part of the medical team, Monday morning, January 16, came. We waded to the hospital at 8:00 a.m. to find people already waiting to see Sara. The night before, we had worked out a system of stations that we would move the patients through; system worked like this: Hugh and Barbara dilated the person's eyes, and tested him or her for glaucoma. Then Sara gave the patient an eye health exam and vision tests, telling the findings to Janie, who wrote them down on the patient's record.

The patient would then come into the next room where Cyndi, Kate, Lee, Helen, Amanda, Eddie, Angela, and I would find

glasses approximately the same strength as the prescription Sara had written down. Finding the right pair of glasses often took several tries, giving the distance and reading tests to the person with several different pairs of glasses to find out which ones helped the most. After a satisfactory pair was found, we would fit the glasses to the patient's face by heating the frames and bending them to the appropriate size. We could fit glasses on three patients at one time. The room sometimes became annoyingly crowded when those waiting in line got too far into the room.

Those of us who were not proficient in Spanish quickly learned all the vocabulary needed for fitting glasses with the help of Kate, Cyndi, and Lee who were all particularly good speakers.

After a patient was fitted with glasses, he or she was finished unless he or she had been diagnosed with an infection of the eye. In that case, Barbara and Hugh had some drops to give them to clear up the infections (usually conjunctivitis).

The first day, we had problems because the glasses were all in boxes, categorized only generally, and we had to dig through many pairs to find one that was close to a prescription we were looking for. In addition, we did not really feel very confident matching the glasses to the prescriptions.

Despite this, the medical team saw and fitted glasses for about 65 people that Monday. It was thrilling for those of us fitting glasses to help a woman who could not even read the

biggest line on the eye chart before to see all the way to the smallest line. Fitting church member Lucio Vanegas with glasses was also gratifying. He, unlike many of the other patients, responded enthusiastically about the help the little round wire-frame glasses gave him, and wore them constantly from that Monday on. The construction team reported later in the week that he was much more outgoing after he got his glasses and that he marveled at being able to see the bubble in the level they were using in building the walls. He had been unable to see it and read the level before.

Another interesting patient was a little boy who could not open his eyes at all because of a disorder that made them overly sensitive to light. Sara put some drops in his eyes, and the next day when he returned for his exam, he had his eyes open.

We saw one woman who had not had an appointment but who had come to the hospital from a long way away and waited there all night. Later in the week, we heard other sad stories from people who did not have appointments, but having so many already signed up, we had to be firm in refusing to see them. Interestingly, only a few of the 300 people who had been given appointments did not show up for their appointments.

That first day, Cyndi already stood out as the clear expert at fitting glasses to people's faces, managed to cheerfully and professionally show all those people how to clean and care for their glasses, never seeming to become bored with what she was telling them. Later in the week, when the rest of us became

rather frustrated and tired, Cyndi's patience amazed us.

Sara's favorite story from the first day was about Rosemary, the young nurse in charge of the hospital. When Sara thanked her for the help she was giving us in moving the patients through, Rosemary responded that she was happy to do it because "these are my people."

The construction team was unable to accomplish much on the church that Monday because it continued to rain throughout the day. Instead, they helped the medical team by bringing snacks to us at the hospital in the afternoon. Lisa in particular endeared herself to us by making chocolate chip cookies to bring to the hospital. Later in the afternoon, the construction group met with some of the leaders from the church in Montero, including the minister and Georges, who explained more to them about the church's role in Latin America.

To our surprise, the medical team finished seeing all Monday's appointments by about 6:00 and had time for showers and dinner at the regular hour. We had feared having to work until 8:00 or 9:00 all week to see all those people and were thrilled to be off so early. We needn't have been so relieved, however, for our fears would be realized later in the week.

Monday evening about 8:00, we all gathered in the dining room of the Casa to hear the minister of the Methodist church in Montero speak to us about liberation theology and the relation of faith to reality in Latin America. Janie translated for him. Before he began to speak, we noted that 8:00 in Bolivia was 6:00

in Birmingham, the time for the weekly chapel service at Birmingham-Southern which was simultaneously beginning, being led by students in Stewart's absence.

The minister began by saying that for him and others the idea that God is on the side of the poor gives them great confidence. They do not feel oppressed by their poverty. The Biblical basis for this is that Christ acts in a concrete reality and deals with it. An example of how liberation theology would interpret scripture may be made by using Luke 19:1-10, the story of Zaccheus, one of the first passages to refer to Christ as "Lord." This passage shows that the early church demanded a total change of oneself and a getting rid of all one owned for conversion. Here Christ goes to Jericho and to Zaccheus who represents the Roman Empire as the chief tax collector, an important person in the city. Jesus makes his point when he eats with Zaccheus. The town pressures Zaccheus to be converted by questioning why Jesus would fellowship with him. Zaccheus agrees to return what he has stolen, and only after he does this does Jesus say salvation has come to him. The point is that Zaccheus is only saved after he sheds all he has owned and all his power.

Zaccheus' salvation leads to freedom for the entire city. Zaccheus too is a child of the faith. This means salvation comes only through faith and not through economic power or social position. The free gift of salvation leads to freedom in life for everyone. Before Zaccheus' conversion, the townspeople

had to pay him to live and were exploited by him. But with Zaccheus' conversion, they are set free by God's gift. So Christ shows through this passage that salvation is not in riches but in God's free gift.

This passage also shows how faith is inextricably bound to reality by promoting justice or injustice. Our faith is seen to be a conditional faith. In Latin America, the faith of the people is conditioned by oppression, but God wants all denominations in Latin America to receive the message that they should challenge the oppression as the early church did in this passage of Luke.

After the minister finished this talk, Mike asked him how the people of the Methodist church in the area are responding to this challenge. He answered that they are responding through developmental work, both economic and evangelical. Projects include teaching the value of soybeans, increasing educational opportunities (something done largely by women's organizations), digging wells for people, and broadcasting educational and evangelical programs put together by the Methodist church from a radio station in Montero. The minister commented that the Methodist church in Bolivia is still in a state of dependence, as is the country, but that they are hoping for independence.

Stewart asked whether the church people find the idea that faith and reality are linked strange or whether they accept it readily. The minister replied that the idea of two separated worlds, this world and the next, was inherited from the Roman

Catholics, and that this makes it difficult for many of the church members to see that faith is bound to reality. Because this idea is different from what the tradition has taught, they find it surprising. The idea of the close relationship between faith and reality is new, coming from liberation theology, which began in the 1960's and came to the fore in the 1970's.

Stewart compared liberation theology with the abolitionist movement in the United States in the Nineteenth century. Both had the idea that the gospel is meant to free people.

The minister said again that faith is a gift of God. We cannot, he said, be neutral because our faith commits us either to justice or injustice. Our faith will always have to come in conflict with reality, and we will be questioned by God as to which side we are on. The minister left us with the question of whether a Christian could continue exploiting his brother and of whether one who exploits could really believe in Christ. Today, he said, those who exploit are those most fervently promoting the gospel, from the Vatican to the United States of America. Latin Americans, he asserted, would like to see Christ set forth. Finally, he urged us to reread the passage he cited in Luke and to think of Latin America. He said they were grateful for our presence in Bolivia as a sign of our solidarity with the people of Latin America.

Our group sang "Amazing Grace," and the meeting ended with a prayer.

Afterwards, the medical team met for reflection on the day

and planning for Tuesday.

In the morning of Tuesday the 17th, the medical team saw 39 more people. Only two of those who had made appointments did not come. The construction team spent the morning cleaning the brick walls of the church with stones, but continuing rain prevented more work. Lunch was wonderful--chicken and gravy over rice, spinach patties, sugar cookies, and lemonade.

About forty more people came through the hospital that afternoon, making a total of over eighty for the whole day. That afternoon, glasses enabled a man who had not been able to see to read in over five years to read again. Also, a man who sold cokes at a nearby store was fitted. Later, when some of our group went to purchase drinks from him, he gave them to them free. Another woman who had only been able to see the first line of the chart went away reading the smallest line. There were other interesting experiences as well. Hugh had to dilate a woman's eyes while she breast-fed her baby. Sara told of occasionally having to stop an eye exam to "come up for air" because some of the patients smelled so bad. A man we had fitted was seen in town later that day looking all around with his new glasses. And Kate told of a dream which indicated the effect that this intensive activity was having on all of us. She had awakened the night before certain that she saw an old Quetchua woman, in her short skirt with her long braids down her back, saying what we all hated to hear: "No veo nada" (I don't see anything).

The construction team completed one more roof truss that afternoon and laid a few bricks.

Dinner was more empañadas with cheese, mixed fruit, cucumbers, and tomatoes. After we ate, we had a short reflection time and sang some songs.

Wednesday, January 18, the beginning of our third week away from home, was a frustrating day at the hospital. We saw about ninety people that day, and we were beginning to tire of standing on our feet, dealing with people, speaking Spanish, and fitting glasses. We were beginning to run short of some of glasses matching the more common prescriptions, and getting people a good pair was getting more difficult. We were particularly fussy in the morning, when the time seemed to crawl by, but the afternoon went more smoothly for those of us fitting glasses. Later we found out, however, that Sara had had serious problems with her rechargeable retinascope, the instrument she used to get the prescriptions the patients needed. The instrument had not been holding its charge all afternoon, and Angela had had to hold it into the electrical outlet between each patient to recharge it enough for Sara to do another exam. After we finally finished work, exhausted, about 8:00, Sara told us of the problem. If the instrument did not begin to work better, she said, the entire project might grind to a halt because she would be unable to prescribe glasses.

Amanda came to the rescue, however, taking the instrument apart and patiently figuring out the problem and correcting it.

Thanks to her work, we were able to see the rest of the patients the next day.

The construction team had a hard day Wednesday, too, doing one of their favorite tasks--leveling the dirt floor they had shoveled into the church. This was done with a contraption they named "The Womper," actually a round section of a tree with two boards nailed to the sides with which to lift the stump. Womping involving picking up the stump and dropping it down on the dirt. Those who weren't doing this completed the brick-laying on the right wall.

We had tried to tell ourselves at the hospital that Thursday would be easier to get through than Wednesday had been because we would know in our minds that it was the last day. It wasn't any easier. After filling our stomachs with oatmeal, we went to the hospital and began the day with a group picture of the medical team. As usual, the morning went by slowly, but at lunchtime, the hospital staff surprised us with a little thank-you lunch of empañadas. Frustration peaked again in the afternoon when the supply of glasses really began running low. Eddie and Amanda got a crash course in classifying glasses and went to work classifying some of the pairs we had brought of which we did not know the strength. We also had to begin resorting to giving people written prescriptions for the glasses they needed when it became impossible to find anything to approximately match what was needed.

About mid-afternoon, Stewart and Walt came in making a

video of the work we were doing. They had already interviewed all the members of the construction team, who had spent the day finishing leveling the floor as well as finishing the trusses, laying brick and beginning to lay stones in the dirt that had been pounded for the floor. When Stewart and Walt came in to interview us, not all of us were in the best of moods, and some of this frustration came through on the video. For one thing, in addition to all the patients who had appointments for Thursday, some people who had gotten glasses earlier in the week had returned, having decided the glasses were not quite right.

Those of us fitting glasses did not have a monopoly on the fatigue. Hugh was so tired by afternoon that he put drops in a man's glass eye to dilate it. And seeing all those people had taken its toll on Sara as well. She had a near fainting spell that afternoon and had to rest a little while before she could continue. We saw over ninety people on Thursday, bringing the week's total to something over 300. Finally the last man came through about 8:00 p.m., and we began to pack everything up.

By the time the medical team ate supper, the construction team had already gone to what was becoming the new church, essentially four walls and a floor at this point, for a farewell worship service with the congregation. The medical team joined the service late, just in time to hear a woman speak on the essential church which unites all people. Following her message, everyone took communion. After the service, some members of the congregation and some of the youth from Montero

surprised us with small gifts, T-shirts, pieces of aguayo with the country of Bolivia embroidered into them, and small straw hats. We took pictures and visited for a while after the service.

Another big event of Thursday was the arrival of a 28th person to join our group. He was Michael Young, one of Stewart's fraternity brothers from Auburn, who is now a television actor in Los Angeles. Michael was in Chile visiting some people and, having become interested in Stewart's service-learning projects, decided to come join us for the final week of our trip. We found Michael an outgoing, joking but sincere and warm person whom we came to like very much by the end of the trip.

Friday morning, January 20, the day many of us had anticipated eagerly, the day we would leave "hell," finally dawned. We packed and met at the Casa for scrambled eggs and bread for our last breakfast and then went outside to say goodbye to the congregation, many of whom had gathered to see us off. Something some of us may not have expected happened: we were SAD to be leaving Yapacani. Maybe this wasn't hell after all. Despite the cold showers, the dirt, the heat, the old Quetchua women, the hard work, the crowding, and the bugs, Yapacani had become dear to us. The congregation of the Upper Room church had opened themselves warmly to us, included us in their fellowship, and been kind to us in every way. Many of us and many of them were crying as we embraced them and said our

goodbyes. Especially difficult was saying goodbye to our cooks, Ruth, Rosa, Rosa, and Dali, to the one who had bought the food, Don Gregorio, to those who had done our laundry, Juana, Valentina, and Nimia, and to those with whom we had worked at the construction site, Don Ari, Don Lucio, Don Teodardo, and particularly Don Simón.

We rode out of Yapacani on an old micro, glad in a way to be leaving, but not so sure anymore that what we were leaving behind was hell. The road was still the road from hell, however, and it was worse than ever that day because of all the rain that week. At one place, a rickety wooden bridge had been partially washed out. Two-by-fours had been placed over the washed out section, so the bridge was still passable, but it was too weak to support heavy vehicles. Big trucks were being driven through the narrow river below rather than going over the bridge. When we reached this place, we all got out of the bus and walked over the bridge. The bus drove over it behind us, and we all got back in and went on to Montero and then to Santa Cruz.

We were once again in the Tropical Inn. Kate, Helen, Eddie, and I were particularly happy to be there because none of us had showered since the preceding Monday. The work at the hospital had tied us up so long that by the time we finished work and supper in the evenings, the water was off. And for some reason, that week the water pressure in the mornings had not been strong enough to run the shower. So we were thrilled

to be able to take warm showers at the Tropical Inn.

Most people spent Friday afternoon shopping in Santa Cruz on their own. Kate, Susan, Mike, Michael, Brian, and I went with Susie, Georges, and his sister Racquel to some craft and music shops they knew. After leaving the music store, most of the group left us, and Kate, Susan, Susie and I got ice cream. A few people stayed at the hotel and called the United States.

Dinner that night was supposed to be at this great restaurant that Stewart and Robin had been to with the Henrys in the summer when they had visited. We were all looking forward to it. We did not find the atmosphere to be as dressy as we had expected; the restaurant was basically a concrete floor and walls covered by a tin roof. The main attraction was the beef, served with yuca, rice, and salad (which we were told not to eat). Opinion was divided about the food; a few really liked it, while most of us wondered what was so wonderful about the place. After the meal, many in the group went dancing in Santa Cruz, while Stewart, Mike, and I went to the Henrys' home to view the video Walt had made of the group.

We arose at 5:00 the next morning, Saturday, January 21, and left the hotel at 5:30 for the airport. Once at the airport (hours before the flight to Cuzco, Peru, was to leave) we waited. By now we were used to "Latin American time" and to waiting, so this did not bother us much. Finally, we boarded our LAB plane for the relatively short flights to LaPaz and then to Cuzco for the vacation and recovery part of the trip.

We arrived in Cuzco about 10:00 a.m. to find it much colder at 12,000 feet than it had been in low Yapacani. We waited in line outside forever to get our passports checked and then fought crowds of people wanting to rent us a taxi to get to the busses the tour guides had waiting for us. The tour guides had already taken care of getting our bags. The busses drove us through the brown city of Cuzco--brown because of the mud dwellings--to the Hotel Picoagua, where we would stay while in Cuzco. We were served coca tea, which supposedly helps one adjust to the altitude, and then moved into our rooms. For lunch most of us ate lightly, soup in the hotel dining room, to prevent altitude sickness. Many of us changed money after lunch, amazed at the inflation of the Peruvian inti and at the exchange rate of about 1,800 intis to one US dollar. What this rate meant was that carrying even a small amount of money around meant carrying huge wads of bills.

At 2:30, we met our guide, Dante, and left for a tour of four sites in and around Cuzco, which was the capital of the Inca empire and which is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the Western hemisphere. We saw a cathedral, an old monastery which had been located in a building built by the Incas, some ruins on a mountain overlooking the city, and a natural rock formation outside the city. Dante explained very carefully and extensively to us about the Inca ways of building structures by cutting huge stones to fit precisely together without the use of mortar. The structures the Incas built have withstood

earthquakes and remained standing even while Spanish colonial structures, often built on top of Inca structures, collapsed. From the ruins over the city, we had a beautiful view of majestic mountains and a double rainbow.

On our way up to these ruins, we stopped at a shop selling alpaca wool products, our first glimpse at the bargains in sweaters, shawls, and blankets we would be able to get in Cuzco. An alpaca is similar to a llama, and the wool products are made in Peru, so they are very cheap; $10 for a wool sweater was common.

We returned to the hotel about 6:30 and had the evening free. Some of us shopped for sweaters on the streets where there were thousands to be had, and others went to eat. One group rejoiced at finding La Momma pizza parlor. The pizza was wonderful; we were back in civilization! The live band, however, played loud native highlands music right over Angela, Eddie, and Cinda's table during the entire meal, which they found somewhat annoying. In general, though, everyone had a good time.

Sunday January 22 was set as the day for our trip to the lost Inca city of Machu-Picchu, about three hours from Cuzco by train. We got up about 4:30 and left for the train terminal at 5:45. The electric train left at 6:15, beginning its winding trip into the mountains. On the first leg of the trip, the turns up the mountain were so sharp that the train had to alternate between going forward and backing up to get through

them. After this section, the train followed a river through the mountains to the Machu Picchu station. The ride was breathtakingly beautiful. Once we arrived at Machu-Picchu, we took a bus on a very steep and curvy road up the side of the mountain to reach the ruins and the hotel at the top. We checked into the hotel, and then Dante took us into the ruins for a tour. It was very foggy when we first walked into the ruins, so most of the wonderful views were obscured. Dante again spent much time showing us the Inca architecture and their knowledge of astronomy, using his compass to show that a string tied between two parts of a rock they had carved pointed due north. We got a little tired of hearing about things that pointed due north, because we could not really see the significance of their pointing north, but Dante seemed impressed by it all. The ruins themselves were extensive and impressive, though, and we marveled that the Incas had built these structures at the top of this mountain.

Compared to the views from the ruins, lunch at the hotel was disappointing. The only option for lunch on the mountain was a full meal with everything from salad to dessert for the extraordinary price of $11.70. The food was not worth the money.

We were free in the afternoon to talk, nap, or wander around the ruins. Earlier in the trip, Melissa had had us each draw the name of another person about whom we were supposed to find out three or four little-known facts to share at the

meeting this night on Machu-Picchu. Many of us had to spend some time that afternoon researching (some said "digging up dirt about") our people.

In the evening, we had the planned team gathering in the lounge of the hotel, beginning with each person sharing what he or she had found out about the other person. Then, in a more serious vein, we began to share with each other what the trip had meant to us, what we had learned, what the most profound memories were. This sharing affected different people in different ways. Some listened quietly, others cried. Sometimes we laughed. Everyone was respectful of the person speaking, and no one seemed to get particularly restless, even though the talking went on for more than three hours. What happened that night is difficult to express in words, but we all felt close to each other because of the personal things we were sharing and because of all that we had experienced together.

After that evening, which was something of a catharsis for us, we felt relaxed and ready to go home. Monday January 23, we spent the morning wandering through the ruins of Machu-Picchu, and most of the group climbed the treacherous trail up the high mountain overlooking the ruins, a peak which afforded them a spectacular view. At 1:30, we rode busses back down the twisting road to the train station and at 2:30 boarded the train for the return to Cuzco. Outside the train were many vendors selling rugs, sweaters, and other crafts. Some of these were very aggressive and threw sweaters into the train for people in

our group to look at. The ride back to Cuzco was different from the ride from Cuzco the day before, for we left the train about midway down and took a bus (on a paved road) the rest of the way into the city. Monday night we were all free to eat or shop. Kate, Cinda, Angela, Lisa, and I had the best service any of us had ever seen at a restaurant near the hotel--a young, energetic waiter assigned just to our table flitted about us during the whole meal.

Tuesday all day was free for shopping on the streets and in the stores of Cuzco for sweaters, blankets, weavings, and jewelry. The wool items and the silver were particularly good buys, and forceful bargaining with the street vendors could bring the prices down even more. Some of us found being accosted by vendors and having to bargain a little tiring, but the sweaters were worth the trouble.

Sickness plagued us again on Tuesday. Amelia woke up with something like the flu, and I came down with a fever late in the afternoon. We later attributed it to the altitude.

The group had its last big dinner together at El Truco, one of Cuzco's best restaurants, that night. At El Truco, everyone was seated at once, with the flag of their country decorating their table, and welcomed by the owner. The price of the evening included everything anyone could want to eat from soup to meat to dessert, and live musicians and dancers performed throughout the meal. It was a festive end for our trip.

Wednesday morning, exactly three weeks after we had left

Birmingham, we began our journey home. In the morning, we checked in at the Cuzco airport and were taken to the gate without undergoing any security check at all. We found this odd, for almost everywhere else we had been, our carry-on bags had been x-rayed and hand searched, and we had walked through a metal detector and had been body searched. Cuzco was different in general, though, for in addition to having no security, the flight also had open seating. We wondered aloud about all this, but we reminded ourselves, as we had many times before when we encountered strange things, that, "this IS the Third World," and went on. Fortunately, we made it safely to LaPaz.

Carolyn Dickerson, a US citizen volunteering for a year as the assistant to the Bolivian Methodist bishop, Bishop Poma, met us at the airport with a bus to take us into LaPaz for a few hours. Also at the airport Brad and Amelia met the little Bolivian girl from LaPaz whom they sponsor and who came to the airport with her parents.

In LaPaz, most of the group went to a Methodist office and met some Methodist officials, shopping a little while afterwards. Neither Amelia nor I felt up to going, so we stayed behind in Michael Young's hotel room. We would be leaving him in LaPaz, where he would stay overnight. He planned to fly to Chile the next day.

At 5:30, we rode back up the steep hill from the city of LaPaz, which is in a valley, to the airport, the highest in the world, at 14,000 feet. The outskirts of LaPaz were dirty and

poor, and Carolyn described to us the pollution of the rivers that goes on. Some of us had seen this pollution for ourselves on the way in, catching a glimpse of blood from a slaughterhouse pouring out of a pipe into the river.

At 8:00, we flew out of LaPaz to Santa Cruz. We thought we were never going to get moving in the direction of home. The Henrys met us in Santa Cruz to say goodbye, and finally about 11:00, we departed Bolivia for the last time. We touched down in Panama City, Panama, again about 3:30 a.m. and finally reached Miami at 6:00 a.m. January 26. It was thrilling to be back in our own country. In Miami, we left LAB for Eastern, and problems began. And we weren't even in the Third World anymore! No, this was the First World, and the plane we were supposed to fly to Atlanta on had a problem. We were delayed for over an hour, then transferred to another flight, arriving in Atlanta about thirty minutes after our flight to Birmingham had left. A later flight brought us into Birmingham and into the arms of friends and family by 12:30p.m.

Home. Paradise. Actually it wasn't paradise, it was Birmingham, Alabama. But after all that we had seen and experienced in the past three weeks, it seemed like paradise at that moment. We had changed. We looked at things in new ways. And this new perspective would affect our views of everything in the weeks and months to come. It even affected our view of Yapacani, which we do not remember as the hell it seemed to be on that day long, long ago.