

Medical Practicum Report

Bonafacio, Costa Rica, January 1989

We departed from Ft. Wayne airfield on schedule at 7:10 am, January 4, and arrived in San Jose, Costa Rica at 4:30 am (Ft. Wayne time) the next day. A bomb threat caused a twelve hour delay in Miami. Because we arrived so late, no one on duty at customs had authority to ok the entry of our medical supplies. While most of our group slept, Dr. Lee Smith and I, with help from Costa Rican friends, secured the release of all our medicines after eight hours of waiting and negotiating.

Our home in Bonifacio for two weeks was the two room school where we slept on the floor in sleeping bags with air mattresses. This year it rained every night, and since the school has no screens, mosquitos were plentiful. Our meals were prepared by several women of the local church in a nearby house in a very simple kitchen. The diet of rice, chicken, vegetables, tortillas and some fruit was adequate but definitely not gourmet.

We held clinics in three communities, two of which were 30-45 minutes away by train. The train that we boarded at 6:30 am stops at each little village, which consists of rows of houses along both sides of the track.

During our two weeks of clinics we had 928 consultations. Complaints ranged from general aches and pains to a variety of skin rashes, serious infections of different types, intestinal parasites, malaria, emergency treatment of deep cuts and minor surgery. The students worked directly with Lee Smith, MD, of Mishawaka, Keim Houser, MD, of South Bend, and Richard Myers, DDS, of Toledo. He and his dental assistant soon found that there had never been a dentist in these communities. Because sugar cane is grown locally and chewed by children from an early age, and because oral hygiene and diets are poor, they were overwhelmed by patients needing dental care. We distributed over 1,000 tooth brushes and gave instructions and demonstrations for their use.

The retail value of our medicines and supplies was over \$10,000. Most were donated through Interchurch Medical Assistance from New Windsor, Maryland, and some furnished by pharmaceutical companies. The rest were purchased to complete the variety of items required. Medicines we did not use were donated to the Ministry of Health and left in the Puesto de Salud (health post) at Bonifacio for use by the resident paramedics.

For the people of Bonifacio, San Andres and Bananito Norte and for our medical team---thank you for your support. This is a cooperative project which you helped to make successful.

Other members of this congregation who went this year are: Martha Miller and Michael P. Miller. We will be glad to share our experiences with you.

Ed Miller report to Manchester Church of the Brethren