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BACK TO THE FUTURE

2007 marks 100 years of SIM missionary work in Bolivia. Come with us on a quick flashback to see how the old timers did it then, and how us newbie missios are having a go now...

THEN

The Mission

New Zealanders George and Mary Allan, burdened by the spiritual needs of Bolivian Indians in the “neglected continent” of South America, formed the Bolivian Indian Mission (BIM) in 1907. In 1909 the first party of five adults and two children arrived in Buenos Aires en route to Bolivia.



Travel

Mary Hudspith (George Allan’s daughter) described their first trip to San Pedro de Buena Vista*: “Their course led them at times along river beds, at other times over barren wastes, and then up and down majestic mountains. At evening the muleteers would unload the animals and build a three-sided wall with the boxes around the spot where the Allans and the new missionaries spread their blankets. This gave a measure of privacy and protection from driving winds. In the mornings, they often woke to see the top blankets either covered with dew or frost, and other times with a coat of fine dust.”

NOW

The Mission

BIM was renamed Andes Evangelical Mission, which merged with SIM (Serving in Mission) in the 1980s. Today there are 82 SIM missionaries from 10 different nations serving in Bolivia. Praise God that the Bolivian church is now starting to send their own missionaries abroad.



Travel



SIM Bolivia missionaries rarely resort to donkeys nowadays - we have motor-cycles, four-wheel drives, and even the Tan van to help us get to remote communities. In the past year we have travelled over 9000

kilometres on Bolivian roads and river beds that are still notoriously rough, narrow and steep, set against spectacular mountain scenery. We thank God for protecting us, and although we felt quite tired at the end of the year, we feel it has been worth it. Our friends, the Quechua people (no longer called Indians), really appreciate the effort we have made to visit them and always want to know when we are coming back.

Accommodation

On arrival, Mary recalls, "After some searching, Mr. Allan secured a couple of rooms to accommodate the five adults and two children ... The entrance from the street led through a room filled with intoxicated men and women, and crying children. Arriving at the door of the courtyard, they stood aside to allow some donkeys to pass through the room to the street ... The scene which met their eyes was disgusting in the extreme. Drunks were lying here and there, sleeping off their stupor. Under the veranda were huge earthen pots, smudged with dirt, containing chicha ready for consumption. Guinea pigs scampered amongst the pots, and just beyond foraged the pigs, horses and donkeys."

Accommodation

Missionaries who have experienced rural travel in Bolivia can even now identify with this scene. Chicha (fermented corn beer) and other forms of alcohol are still a favoured form of entertainment, and a big social



problem in many areas. Whenever we travel to an area where the roads have been too narrow for the Tan van, we also bunk down on the floor, on top of school desks, or share a mattress with a variety of small biting creatures. Yet before we start complaining too much, we praise

God that our Lord Jesus gave up the glorious riches of heaven to come to earth and share the lives of sinful man. And the living conditions we only experience once in a while is an everyday reality for the people we serve.

Opposition & Suspicion

"In those days the preaching of the Gospel in its purity, free from the 'mandates of men' was a novelty which the priests described as pernicious heresy, inspired by Satan for the perdition of souls. The very sight of a colporteur caused the common people to tremble as timid sheep in the presence of a wolf. So it was not strange that such a fearsome person should be deprived even of bread. Still less likely was it that he would be granted a room wherein to preach this new Gospel ... when the writer was journeying on foot to the San Pedro headquarters from Acacio and came suddenly upon three Indian girls shepherding their sheep, they showed how deep was their terror by falling flat on their faces something like the ostrich hiding her head in the sand, hoping not to be noticed!"

Opposition & Suspicion

We have not seen too many Quechua shepherd girls falling flat on their faces, but as in any small country town, the arrival of a stranger still



generates much speculation as to his intentions. Bolivia has history of being exploited by foreigners ever since the Spanish discovered silver in the city of Potosi 500 years ago, which explains some of their suspicion even today. **Thank God** for the open doors the

Lord has provided for us to minister in these rural communities through Project Walkabout. We are usually mobbed by curious children and astonished adults the first time the Tan van pulls into a small town, many of them reading and memorising the Bible verse painted on the sides (John 8:12). But whenever we return, we are greeted by friendly waves as a queue starts to form at the local hospital.

Health Care

"It is Sunday, the hour for service has arrived, the seats are arranged, the preacher and organist are ready, - but where is the congregation? It means something to enter a Protestant meeting place here. Whoever does so incurs the curse of the Holy Mother Church. We commence to sing and a crowd gathers. By a little persuasion, we soon have a fine little congregation inside, and a larger one peeping in at the window and door. Those who have entered are all men, and all are of those to whom we have rendered some help. This one was healed of pneumonia, that one saved from insanity, this other man healed of a broken nose and injured eye, and that one over there is the father of an only child snatched from the very jaws of death."

Health Care

Looking around the small churches we visit, we still see those the Lord has brought to Him through their illnesses. One man became a Christian after emergency surgery for a volvulus caused by Chagas



disease. An elderly lady with a dense right-sided stroke committed her life to Christ during a wedding ceremony. Others have come to church because of difficulties at home, alcohol abuse, neurocysticercosis, and tuberculosis. Even though I often feel overwhelmed by the volume of patients waiting to see me for medical care, it's wonderful when there's a keen Bolivian

pastor by my side praying with the sick and preaching the gospel to those who come. **Pray for us** as we seek to develop more good partnerships in ministry this year.

Missionary Kids

At first, George Allan's children attended a village school for Bolivians run by a fellow missionary, but when they got older they were sent to the American Institute school in La Paz. Mrs Allan went with them and worked as a nurse to pay for their tuition. The family was separated for seven years. In 1927 a school for missionary children was opened in San Pedro. This later became the Carachipampa Christian School (CCS) in Cochabamba that initially offered boarding facilities for missionary children. Today, CCS is one of SIM Bolivia's key ministries and serves as a Christian witness to upper-class Bolivian families.

Missionary Kids



Thank the Lord that Alex and Maddie did well at Sydney Distance Education Primary School last year despite having class in the back of a four-wheel drive, camped beside a river, in the laundry and inside a bus. When we are in town, the CCS branch in Sucre kindly allows them to bring their work and study with their missionary friends. **Pray** for the girls as they continue distance learning this year, Alex starting High School, Maddie in Year 4 and Annie in Kindy. **Pray** that the Lord will provide another short-term tutor to help with home school this year. **Pray** that the Lord will show

us what's best for our children's education in the long-term.

Church growth

"Conference ended with the baptism of twelve San Pedro converts. Others were asking for baptism, but in this land one likes to see the evidence of the new life first. As someone has aptly put it, it is easy to be 'converted to Christianity' while not being 'converted to Christ'. Among this group was probably the first image-maker in Bolivia to be baptized. Like a more recently-converted idol-maker, he confessed, 'I, a dead man, used to make dead images for dead people; but now I have life in Christ and have been baptized in His name. I have destroyed all the images in my house and wish now only to serve the Lord who has saved me.'"

Church growth

Praise God for the growth of the church in Bolivia. Pastor Pablo, who travels with us sometimes, tells me that every time he visits the town



of Presto, someone else becomes a Christian. Apart from the medical work, our hope is to strengthen the church by equipping church leaders in the places we visit. **Pray** for the children Liling works with who will be leaders of the church in Bolivia one day. **Pray** for spiritual growth and maturity in the

adults Lawrence works with. **Pray** that the Lord will bless the ministry of a young Bible Seminary graduate named Pastor, who will be working with us this year as co-driver, mechanic and youth worker.

Prayer

While still in Bible College in Adelaide, Mary Stewart (who would become Mrs. Allan) met daily with a friend to pray to God on behalf of the "downtrodden Indians". The Lord assured them that thousands would come rejoicing into the Kingdom of God, and they left their prayer meeting weeping with tears of joy, little knowing how Mary and George would be used by the Lord in Bolivia.

Prayer



"By Prayer" is still the SIM motto, and as you've seen, the Lord is abundantly answering Mary Allan's prayers from 100 years ago. **Ask the Lord** of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field among the Quechua people. Thank you all for your prayerful support and continue to **pray** for wisdom as we begin planning strategic trips for this year.

For some excellent photos and commentary from Trish Lee about her trip to visit us with a team from her church in October, click on our webpage www.atergram.com.au/TheTans. You'll find links to her website under Ministry Photos.

*All excerpts taken from Hudspeth MA, *Ripening Fruit. A History of the Bolivian Indian Mission*. Harrington Press, New Jersey. Not dated.

LAWRENCE AND LILING TAN NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2007

SIM Bolivia: Casilla 575 Sucre Bolivia. 591 (4) 645 6004 lawrence.tan@sim.org

SIM Australia: PO Box 42 Penhurst NSW 2222. (2) 9580 1422 www.sim.org.au

Newsletter editors: Cian & Jeremy King, 16 Captain Strom Place Dundas NSW 2117. jcking@bigpond.net.au