

From Ship to Shore...

Feb-Mar 2003



Dios te bendiga!!

That means “God bless you” in Spanish – perhaps the phrase I used most over the past 6 weeks! Well, I just moved back onto the ship after 6 weeks of traveling throughout the Dominican Republic. The school I was in, DTS, ended last week. It was sad to see our time come to an end, but we have many amazing memories to hold onto. Our team covered a lot of ground in the DR; we moved every week to a new location. Our experiences ranged from very practical, hands-on kind of work to building relationships with the Dominicans we met. We found that in helping people in physical, tangible ways, doors were opened for relationships to be built. For example, I spent a week building a concrete path and stairs in a very small village in the mountains. Many people from the village came out to help, and some great conversations started on the worksite! One of my favorite experiences was building a playground at a home for disabled youths. The children were so curious about what we were doing, and they made sure to get our attention by jumping into cement-filled wheelbarrows or pulling on our legs as we were working. It was so much fun to be around them!



I also very much enjoyed building a fish pond to be used to raise fish for food in a town called Jarabacoa. The ground we were digging was very wet, and we were literally up to our waists in...well, manure. We found out soon after we were covered that the ground was used for compost! It became the source of many jokes.

I was certainly pushed out of my comfort zone in many ways over the course of outreach, one of those ways being that I performed in many dramas. In the Dominican culture, people are very responsive to the performing arts, so our team put together and performed programs that included dramas and songs. We performed them anywhere from local parks in small villages to the beach at a predominantly tourist area.

As fun and entertaining as the work and dramas were, the real significance of our time in these places was the relationships formed. It was very difficult for me at first to relate to people whose language I didn't speak and whose culture I didn't understand. But God worked on my heart gradually, through many Dominicans, and I just fell in love with the culture and especially the people. Not only is the culture in general so friendly and laid back, but we also found that the Dominicans are very ready to respond to the

Gospel. I am so fortunate to have been able to witness incredible acts of the Holy Spirit moving in the lives of people. There are so many people that I would like to ask you to join with me in prayer for, but I will share just one story of a woman named Marlana. We had an afternoon off one day, so I decided to go to the beach with a few of my friends. We went to a restaurant and found that there was only one other person there, a woman sitting at the bar. I started small talk with her (that's about all I can do with my limited Spanish), and found out that she was a beach vendor who braids tourists' hair for money. I also discovered that she spoke English very well. Suddenly, after only a minute or two of conversation, she locked her eyes with mine and held her gaze fixed on my eyes. After several seconds, her face crumpled and she started crying. Her speech became rather unintelligible through her sobs, but she talked and cried for maybe twenty minutes. I was able to understand that she has had a problem with alcohol for some time. She also told me that she could no longer feel love, from her family and especially from God. I shared with her about the unconditional love of Jesus, and we prayed together before I left. What amazes me most about that situation is that I didn't say or do anything to lead her into that conversation; I believe that God worked it out through His perfect timing. One quick follow-up note: Marlana and I have "run into" one another a few times since then and have talked and prayed together.



After traveling throughout the country, I am now back on the ship, working in the computer department. We will still be in the DR until the end of April. Thank you so much for your prayers. Please continue to pray for this country; there are many villages in which very amoral traditions still hold. In one village I stayed in, the men are encouraged to have several wives and families, and it is routine to take a boy to a prostitute for his 13th birthday. We met one thirteen year-old girl who was pregnant. She told us that she had formerly been a child prostitute. Her life had been devastated as a result of the incredibly strong traditions in her society. Please also keep in prayer the many churches and ministries here in the DR. They are alive and growing. God is doing amazing things in this country!

Love and miss you all,
Katie

