



## THE FINAL YEAR OF THE MILLENNIUM BEGINS

In this issue, we will try to give you some of the flavor of daily life, and also expand on a few of our more memorable experiences. Thank you for your interest in our lives. We hope that as time goes by we can paint a decent picture of the who, what, when, where, how -- and why -- of our life as missionaries.

## A DAY IN THE LIFE

Although we are still in the process of settling into our Venezuelan lifestyle, we can give a rough version of daily life here. We're up by about 6:00am and out the door at 7:00am to walk Alyssa across the driveway to her Venezuelan Montessori school. Then we drive Daniel to bi-lingual Venezuelan school at 7:20am, which is in the same part of the city as the mission office where Jeff works. Sometimes just Jeff and Daniel make that drive; other days Diane drops them both off and has the truck during the day to go to language classes, Bible study, grocery shopping, countless errands, or doctor appointments.

Diane picks Alyssa up from school at 12:30pm, then they have lunch and a quick debriefing of school and homework. Alyssa has time to change out of her school uniform and maybe do a quick home school lesson, before picking up Daniel across town at 2:15pm.

Jeff's office work day starts after Daniel is taken to school, and ends anywhere between three and six in the afternoon. It is a 75% of full-time assignment. We both have as part of our assignment to Venezuela participation on a church-starting team. The team of which we are a part is the Caracas Low Income Team. We currently participate on that team at a fairly low level, because for the first year here our continuing language learning takes the place of a lot of the church-starting activities.

So, we are often all home by about 3:00pm or so. Daniel does his homework, both kids do chores, the parents work on language learning activities, and we try to get outside if time allows. Living on the 13th floor in a megacity makes outdoor play a very conscious, almost planned activity. The kids aren't at the age yet that they can go outside to the playground/basketball court area on their own. After dinner, we like to read books together (currently "The Hobbit" series), then split up -- guys and girls -- to read the Bible, pray, talk about our faith, and wind down the day by 8:00 or 8:30pm.

Venezuelans eat their main meal of the day, usually together, at home from 12:00 noon till 2:00pm. Then they have a light meal around 8:00pm before bedtime. We haven't adapted to that custom very well yet.

## "THE DISASTER"

It's often simply called the disaster, or the tragedy. It happened only four days after we arrived in Caracas. Actually, the cause of the flooding and massive landslides was happening even as we arrived: days and days of unseasonable rain were saturating the coastal mountain range between Caracas and the ocean. Coastal roadways disappeared. The land changed shape: beaches gone, hillsides moved into valleys, new river beds formed. We got a behind-the-scenes look at what archeologists see when they dig below a city and find another city underneath. The home video footage shown on TV was terrifying and spellbinding at the same time. And to think it was only (what used to be) a 40 minute drive away.

As Jeff drove through the area a couple times to carry in volunteers, drinking water, food, and water storage tanks, there were some quite impressive sights. There were new, wide, dry river beds where neighborhoods used to be. There was more mud than one can imagine, drying to form an entirely new topography. There were houses hanging off

mountainsides where the ground had slid away underneath; rows of parked cars where only the tops could be seen in the mud; mud filling second floors of buildings. Of one area in particular, if you were dropped in blindfolded without knowing what had happened, you would ask: how recently did the bombing stop? The flowing mud collapsed some roofs while holding up the walls, before it moved on. Jeff's assessment after three and a half months is: this tragedy is *very* much "not over"! It was surprising to see how little change/improvement had occurred between his first visit the week after the flooding, and the second visit a month later.

One impressive conversation was with a boy, maybe age 10. Jeff was talking with him about the availability of basic supplies in his barrio. He said food is fairly easy to get, but water is a different story. This boy said, "if you have a glass of water in your stomach, you consider yourself full."

A couple weeks after the disaster a group of clowns from a Caracas area church presented a skit to about 30 children who had lost their homes in the landslides. When someone in the skit mentioned the word "rain" the children began crying, and they had to quickly move to another activity. Many children still become frightened when it begins to rain.

There have been around 75,000 bodies found -- and many more not found. Over a half million lost their homes.

## COMING UP

Semana Santa, the week before Easter, we will be in Miami for eight days to obtain our one year resident visas. There is a ton of paperwork and preparation that goes into it. It will be interesting to be in the states again, and a wonderful opportunity to visit with Grandma and Grandpa Fisher and Grandma and Grandpa Cramer!

In June the IMB missionaries in Venezuela gather for an annual meeting. It is held over in the far west Andean region of the country. We look forward to seeing that area, and getting a better understanding of the lives and work of the missionaries and nationals we'll meet.



### Of the kids, by the kids, and for the kids...

#### Daniel:

I'm having fun at my school that I go to. We have music and PE and another music. We do exercises, and we do soccer and races in PE. We're singing a song in music called "And That's the Way It Is". I like our apartment up here on the 13th floor that is sort of big and sort of small. One of our cats, named Tiger, is rather fat. And Stinky, Alyssa's cat, is skinnier, stinkier, and more active.

#### Alyssa:

We had a teeny tiny itsy bitsy car for a few days, and we almost got crashed by a big, humongous truck -- 10 feet wide and nine yards long.

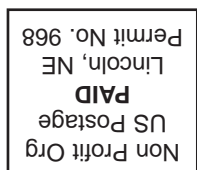
## BROWNEWS IN BRIEF

This is not about the Browns in briefs; it's some short glimpses into our life.... Alyssa's "April fools" came in the form of the sad discovery that eggs you buy at the market don't hatch, even when put in a nice, soft, little velvet pouch, and left for a couple weeks in a drawer for incubation.... We have an opportunity to purchase a piano from a missionary family who is selling theirs, Jeff is really looking forward to playing one again.... After two incredibly moving testimonies of the evidence of God working in people's lives in an outdoor worship service, Alyssa whispered, "Mommy, I'd really like to hear somebody else's ceremony, too!".... We live in a middle class area of Caracas. Among the middle and upper classes especially, people tend to be somewhat closed, isolated, and less friendly than we are used to. Because of this, even though there are only four apartments on our floor, and they all share a common elevator, we weren't totally surprised when we laid eyes on the resident of an apartment on our floor for the first time after living here nearly four months. Such is Caracas life.... Recently Daniel said, "Mom, I know the four ways God answers prayer -- do you want to hear them? 1) yes; 2) no; 3) wait; 4) yes, and so much more.".... Jeff's latest culture shock: no NCAA basketball tournament on TV. (Last year he

and some fellow language students found a local restaurant with a big screen TV and had a blast watching the tournament).... Our kittens, Tiger and Stinky, are doing well after their first touch-and-go month out of the animal shelter. They are a lot of fun. One is sweet; ... one is psycho. They are great companions for each other, and for us.... We have found some city parks, and a Children's Museum to enjoy. And we hope to get out of the city more often as time goes by.... The kids seem to be doing well in their schools. It's amazing to think of them sitting under Spanish language instruction 50-60% of the school day. They don't show it too often around us, but they handle themselves pretty well in their new language, especially around their school friends.... Jeff just shaved off his fairly full beard, and Alyssa still exclaims, "Dad, you look so skinny!" (Diane is wondering how to grow a beard, so *she* can shave!)

## LANGUAGE BLOOPER OF THE MONTH

Jeff couldn't understand why Alyssa's school sent home a note requiring her to bring a sea-blue monkey with her on her field trip to the zoo. Diane explained that *mono azul marino* here in Venezuela means navy blue sweat pants.



## "It Takes a Village..."

More contributions of some of our friends, because it takes a community of people to successfully prepare, move, and support a family going overseas to serve

- ☞ John Langston of Mill Valley, California for teaching us how to tell the grand story of the Bible as an oral chronological/theological drama, exactly what's needed here
- ☞ Todd Lichtenfeld of Lincoln, Nebraska for helping move some of the big stuff
- ☞ Jay Lockard of Lincoln, Nebraska for cheerfully donating his time and talent to build the crates that still hold our belongings out there somewhere, to be shipped to Venezuela in a few months
- ☞ Sam & Sarah Lord of Lincoln, Nebraska for the computer that connects us with our world of friends, and enables us to work more efficiently!
- ☞ Mark and Anne Lorenz for much needed support along the way (and their kids for Christmas gifts gratefully received in March!)

News from Jeff & Diane

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If you know somebody who would like to receive **BROWNEWS**, send their address to:

Sue Thomsen at either:  
7650 Cross Creek Circle  
Lincoln Ne 68516; or  
glrthomsen@juno.com.

If for some reason you would like to discontinue receiving these newsletters, or would like information about our Prayer Community, let Sue know.

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