



GOING INTO THE MINES

We are now regularly attending a church called Getsemaní, which is Spanish for the place where Jesus spent his last night on earth praying – Gethsemane in English. It is in a relatively small barrio (slum) called Las Minas (the Mines). Some barrios in Caracas have several hundreds of thousands of residents – Las Minas is much smaller. We "discovered" Las Minas this spring while looking for yet another church to visit. The barrio is tucked among middle/upper class neighborhoods. We liked Las Minas right away, and it's sort of on the way between where we live and where Jeff works, so it's less of a major production to go there during the (office) work week, meaning we can get there more often. Getsemaní Baptist Church is a small congregation, with maybe 20 people attending any given Sunday. We'll see in the coming months, as our other responsibilities allow us time, if we can work in conjunction with Getsemaní and other Christians in Las Minas to have an impact in the barrio. We are glad to have settled on a church of which to become a part.

THE U

Venezuela has a few dozen distinct cultures (people groups), each with its own language. Most of these are tribes in the Amazon jungle down by Brazil in the south, or the Orinoco River delta over by Guyana in the east, or along the Columbian border in the west. The largest people group in Venezuela is, of course, Spanish-speakers.

Last year we visited Aroy, one of the few accessible villages of the U tribe in the mountains near Columbia. We watched a missionary work with them on forming a written language to capture the sounds they make, using the book of Genesis, in order to eventually complete a Bible translation.

It was a National Geographic scene. Naked toddlers were running around playing with dirt and sticks among the thatched-roofed dwelling made from tree branches. There were chickens and dogs and pigs and people all about. They have no electricity, running water, or what we think of as sanitation.

An elderly woman sang us a song in the U language about God coming, us asking things of Him, and good coming from it. It was cool to hear and see her sing, very much in the style of some of the native north-American peoples. Their church area consists of some poles, benches, a roof, and a low stage -- no walls, no floor. It was so odd to hear about the discussion the U Christians had about what God's name would be in their language. How's that for heavy! "Okay, today we'll name God."

Drunkenness, unknown to them before the Spanish conquest, was a big problem in Aroy until recently, as it still is in most U villages. In addition to drinking, historically they are known as a warring people, frequently fighting at the individual level, the family level, the village level, among villages, and with other peoples.

But Aroy has changed greatly since the church was started by some of them a few years ago. Only nine men reportedly still drink; and the fighting has given way to civility -- they've even taken to hugging. We heard the pride in their voices as they told how the village is no longer plagued with drinking.

Now in 2001 this tribe, while maintaining what was left of their cultural identity after the conquest, is experiencing the beginnings of what we call a Church Planting Movement – new U Christians forming churches, and those churches moving out and starting more churches, in their areas and beyond. Missionaries who are working with them are basically only consulting and helping them do their own leadership training at this point. They report U Christians having all night singing and prayer meetings, and braving threats of Columbian guerilla activity to walk long distances to be trained and taught.

The U people are a bright spot in the mostly dark, apathetic spiritual landscape of Venezuela. They were very kind to us when we visited, and we are excited for them.

VOLUNTEER LIAISON

Diane works wonderfully with volunteer groups that come to help the Barrios Caracas Team for a week or two – so well, in fact, that the Team is experimenting with using her as a helper/liaison with all of the ten or so groups that annually come down, instead of only those to which the Browns are assigned. It is one of the things she loves most about our work: the effort and the pace drains most missionaries, but it energizes Diane. Meeting new people, making new friends, and seeing that volunteers have a positive, memorable experience that makes a difference in the lives of Venezuelans are strengths she enjoys using for God's glory.

★ ★ ★ BACK TO THE USA ★ ★ ★

Thanks to Diane's dad and a scheduled business trip for Jeff, we were able to travel to the US in August, mostly visiting relatives. Jeff's whole family was able to get together for the first time since the early to mid 1980s, at his sister Julie's house in Arkansas, which was a big treat. Also, the kids were able to see Judge Grandpa Brown on the bench before his retirement next year. Diane got to see her mom's house in southwest Iowa for the first time.

There was some culture shock on the trip. Jeff hadn't been to the states since 1998 (Miami doesn't really count), and was struck by how strangely people drive in the US. They leave a big space between their car and the cars in front and to the sides; they wait until traffic passes to pull onto a street; they wait at red lights even if nobody is coming; they don't stick their bumpers out into traffic to signal their intent to pull out onto the roadway; they don't wave out the windows to slow down traffic to let them into another lane or make a turn across lanes of traffic; they don't regularly cut other drivers off; they don't make the shoulders into two additional lanes; etc. Jeff practically panicked when Diane was driving, following his parents three or four car lengths back – it felt like they were a mile ahead and we were going to lose them. Some of these "foreign" ways work their way into one's mindset over time and become normal, then the US can seem odd. Driving wasn't all: the newer houses and their yards in the states seem so large. And the miles upon miles of near perfect-looking crops – think of all the food!

It was great to be back and see friends and family again.



Diane and the kids on the Indiana Train

GETTING USED TO IT?

We have been in Venezuela 21 months now. They have not been easy in terms of cultural adjustment. We feel there have been more adjustments to make moving from Costa Rica to Venezuela than there were moving from the United States to Costa Rica. Some things prove harder to get used to than others: living and raising kids indoors due to crime and no nearby grass or rec areas; living outside the barrio in a middle-class area, where it's very hard to get to know people; living in a huge, unfriendly city where the people have become cold due to their suspicion and fear as the city has grown into a megacity; spending so much time in the car in a city clogged with vehicles (6 or 7 million people in a city covering no more area than Des Moines, Iowa!). If God hadn't led us here and wasn't sustaining us here, we might not choose to still be here. As you can tell from our newsletters, there are many positive things that occur in our lives in Caracas. But there are many ways in which we are still adjusting as well.

BACK TO SCHOOL

Daniel and Alyssa are heading back to separate schools this year: Alyssa to the same Lutheran Spanish-language school (La Concordia) that they both went to last year, and Daniel to an English-language school which rents space from La Concordia in the same building and is attended mostly by missionaries. This will be Daniel's eighth school as he enters fourth grade. They were recently tested for academic achievement in the Dominican Republic by a US specialist and were at or above grade level.

BROWNEWS IN BRIEF

This is not about the Browns in briefs; it's some short glimpses into our life....We've set next summer as the beginning of our 11-month Stateside Assignment, which is a time of refreshing, reconnecting, and networking....We have three cats these days – Stinky is approaching two years with us, and Rascal and Ice Cream who are not yet a year old. Actually, they're all rascals....The Horn family from New Covenant Church in Lincoln, Nebraska visited us in June, and brought with them a load of supplies from the church, for which we are extremely grateful....We met some missionaries who are in language school in Costa Rica who have been attending Cinco Esquinas church, the one we were in while there. It's

been fun to talk with them about it. We still miss that church....Daniel participated in his first national competition in karate. The first half was going through solo routines, the second was a single elimination fight tournament. He lost his first fight but did well, knocking the other kid down four times, his opponent twice requiring brief medical attention....The Rodgers family is leaving for Columbia, which is sad for us because Anna Rodgers is one of both Daniel and Alyssa's best friends in Caracas, and they have been with us on the Barrios Caracas Team. Bummer man....We were able to spend two enjoyable weeks in the Dominican Republic in July, vacationing and attending a meeting of all Southern Baptist missionaries in the Caribbean region. These meetings were one of the year's highlights for all four of us....New Covenant Church in Lincoln had its Sunday worship service in the middle of a downtown street during our weekend visit there. We thought it was a great idea and a great time....Alyssa isn't quite "with it" when it comes to English figures of speech. The other day she said something like "that was so hard he couldn't resist it". When asked how to say you "can't stand it" in Spanish, she said "no puedo resistir", so she just directly translated it into English. We can imagine her in a college setting someday when somebody tells something that bugs them, like paper cuts, and Alyssa sympathizes, "Oh, I know, I can't resist that!" And they wonder what planet she dropped in from.

News from Jeff & Diane

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