



ELCA

News from La Paz, Bolivia

by Kari Eller



IELB

El Chairo Boliviano- The Bolivian Stew

Greetings from Urrumani, Bolivia! This month,

October 27, 2009

Justin and I had a chance to travel with our friends to see their hometowns. We took a taxi from La Paz to Caranavi (4 hours through the mountains on a semi-paved road with no guardrail) and another taxi from Caranavi to Urrumani (2 hours on the same road). I believe the road there made our own faith stronger as we prayed for our safe arrival the whole way! (See picture below for an idea of



how cars pass each other on the road). Exiting the taxi, we crossed the Río Selva in canoe and walked for two hours on a dirt road again through the mountains, seeing trees where the fruit we buy at the market actually grows. We discovered plátanos manzanos (red bananas), papachocolate comes from), mangos, avocados, rice and coca produce a fruit used for medicinal purposes, and plants that which can be used to wash clothes, just to name a few. We



arrived at the house of our friend's relative and ate our lunch: rice with tuna, tomatoes, and onions. His relative offered us her own bed to rest on afterwards. Made of two tree trunks and the mattress of straw, we slept and slept well after such a long journey. Rested, we soaked our feet in the river and waited for her husband to come home. At 5:30pm, he arrived and we loaded 13 sacks of rice into the back of his truck to take back with us (our friend receives a portion of his relatives' rice harvests of rice).

and 10 huge bags of coca leaves. We unload and load the sacks of rice into the canoe to take back across the river, to put in a taxi to Caranavi. The taxi ride back was a little squished with 13 sacks of rice, 6 people in the back seat, and 2 in the front, but nevertheless, we made it back. All of this to say that our trip to Caranavi and Urrumani was AMAZING and definitely unforgettable. What we



saw and experienced in Urrumani was beautiful in so many ways; of nature, God's creation, and a community of people willing to share and help one another. This month, I was reminded that alone, our work is small, but in community, it is strengthened. That we as the church are God's community of believers, and that God sends us into the world, into our own communities to be God's feet and hands in the world. I pray that like in Urrumani, we are all inspired to serve each other as brothers and sisters in Christ for the betterment of all of our communities.



**Spotlight on...
the Verena Wells
Internado**



Visiting Caranavi, Justin and I had a chance to see the newly constructed Internado Verena Wells (in the picture, this is the tall yellow building). Internados house students whose families live far from a school, making it more economical for the students to stay together and closer to their school. In general, students return home to their families every 10-15 days. In an internado, students have chores, receive help with their studies/homework, and have fun often going on field trips as a group. The Verena Wells Internado is the first ever Lutheran internado in Bolivia and will soon become the second home of many excited girls!



El mate de coca or coca tea, is a yellowy-greenish color and tastes something similar to sweet green tea. It is known in Bolivia to help with medical problems such as (but definitely not limited to) altitude sickness, digestion, hunger, headaches, rheumatism, fatigue, and thirst because of its nutritional value and ability to increase the absorption of oxygen in the blood. Drinking mate de coca or chewing coca leaves forms an important part of the Aymara culture. You can buy bags of dried coca leaves from vendors at kiosks on the street and coca flour and other products such as cookies and tea in grocery stores. Coca leaves are also used for offerings and the leaves can be read to tell the future.

Top 5 things we see on our way to work

1. Polleras (see description →)
2. Fruit and vegetable stands
3. Cobblestone streets
4. Children running to school with their parents
5. Huge cementary and mausoleum



Polleras are layered skirts worn by many Aymara women accompanied by a crinolin like embroidered set of 4-5 underskirts.



Coca leaves drying on a tarp

What We've Been up to Lately...

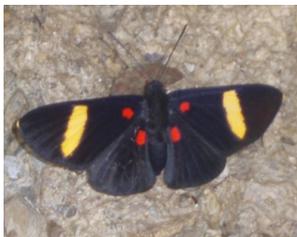
- continued work on our residency (all paperwork is in and pending approval...hopefully, middle of November we'll hear something!)
- getting settled into our apartment (we came with clothes and books!)
- looking into Aymara classes (although Justin and I already know Spanish, most members of the Lutheran church here in Bolivia also speak Aymara)
- attended a workshop on sexuality and reproductive rights (sponsored by the Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias, CLAI)
- teaching workshops in collaboration with the Office of Mission and Youth to national missionaries and youth district leaders (see articles below)



Rice must be peeled before it can be cooked



Us, with friends at an ecological restaurant



a very photogenic butterfly

October 9th and 10th, Justin taught a group of 15-20 district youth leaders from many different areas of Bolivia about sacraments, justification, law and gospel, the Trinity, and facilitated a Bible study. Among their many conversations, a few that stand out are: the current difficulties the youth leaders are facing in their districts, survival of the Aymara culture within the Lutheran church, and the role of the youth in the church today.



Part of the town where our friend was born



Me, on the path we walked on for 2 hours to get to Urrumani

A flota (big tour bus) passing a produce truck on its way to Caranavi. Sometimes it was just better to not look!



Beautiful nests we saw hanging from a tree

Bolivia's National Flowers

This flower is one of Bolivia's national flowers. It is called "Patuju" and is related to the bird of paradise plant. Its colors of red, yellow, and green are representative of Bolivia's flag. I took its picture in Caranavi and later discovered its meaning.



Question: Did you say national flowers? Why have more than one?

Answer: Yes, I did! There are two national flowers in Bolivia and here's why. The Andes Mountains and the Amazon Rainforest are natural separations within the country where different groups of people live. People from the Andes or western side are called "kollas" and people from the Amazon or eastern side are called "cambas." Kantuta is native to the western side and Pantuju to the Eastern side. The government in 1990 passed a Supreme Decree that says "*...they shall always be represented crossed over each other with one stem of the Kantuta Tricolor leaning toward the right and one reed of the Patuju Bandera leaning toward the left, as an interlaced symbol of union between the regions, ethnic groups, cultures, and natural resources of the Republic.*"

Question: What can we as humanity learn from these two beautiful flowers?

Answer: For you to decide.

The “Kantuta” is the second national flower of Bolivia and is also red, yellow, and green. There is a legend that accompanies this flower which I found fascinating and would like to share with you. It goes like this:



La leyenda del Kantuta

The legend of the Kantuta

“It is said that long ago lived two Incan kings, Illimani and Illampu. Both were wealthy and each owned vast quantities of land in the Kollasuyo (now the Altiplano, or Bolivian highlands in Western Bolivia). Each also had one son. Jealous of each other’s wealth, one of the kings mounted an attack against the other and during combat, each was mortally wounded. Although both of their sons had been against the war to begin with, upon their death beds each made their son promise to avenge their death by warring against each other. Bound by their promises to their fathers, a second battle ensued and this time, as history always repeats itself, the sons each mortally wounded the other. However, unlike their fathers, before dying the princes forgave one another and made their servants promise to bury them side by side on the battlefield. Pachamama (known as Mother Earth or Mother Nature, and sometimes referred to as the Goddess of Fertility) appeared to the princes before they died. She told them they should not be punished for their fathers’ wrongdoing. So she caused the stars of their fathers to fall from the sky. Upon crashing to the earth they formed the snow-covered mountains you can still see on the Altiplano today, which have been named Illimani and Illampu, and are the two highest mountains in the region. It is said the rivers that form when their snowcaps melt are actually their tears of regret and these fertilize the valleys where the Kantuta now grows. The Kantuta is considered a symbol of unity because its two primary colors (red and yellow) were the colors used by the king’s sons. Green is the color of hope.”

-taken from: <http://www.boliviabella.com/kantuta.html>

Illimani and Illampu are two mountains that I see everyday!

Also, please be sure to
check out Justin's devotional blog: thepilgrimpastor.blogspot.com
& his food blog: thepilgrimpastor.wordpress.com

If you know of someone who would also like to receive this email and who is not currently on my email list, please send me their first and last name along with their email address to: kfeller5@yahoo.com and I'll make sure that they also receive a copy!

If you would not like to receive any more e-newsletters from Bolivia, please email me at: kfeller5@yahoo.com with the words "STOP" in the message title. I will take your name off of the list as soon as possible.