

St. Thomas Work Trip May 1-10, 1990

Based on a diary of the trip written by Becky Swackhammer

On May 1, 1990 thirteen people from SABC loaded up at church to go to St. Thomas. They went to help do repairs as a result of Hurricane Hugo on Bluewater Bible College for Audley and Consie Charlton and also on their home. He was the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church and the director at the college. The Charlton's were missionaries we supported at the time, they are now retired. The workers from SABC were John Bulkeley, Lev Harper, Phil and Judy Keith, Karlene Sorber, Jim and Lois Strobe, Bob and Allie Strobe, Ed and Becky Swackhammer, Elmer Storozow and Tom Truax. Other churches sent helpers but the group from SABC was by far the largest. Joe Yoder was from another church who committed from the beginning to see the project completed before he left and he was the one who was in charge of all the helpers.



Our group first flew into San Juan and then took a smaller plane into St. Thomas and then had a wild ride to Bluewater Bible College with two vans (one with a hole in the floor), lots of fumes, terrible roads and driving on the left!

Jim and Lois got a nice new apartment in the basement of the boy's dorm since they were to celebrate their 17th wedding anniversary while they were there. They were later presented with an anniversary cake. What a surprise! The rest of the ladies slept in the women's dorms and the men in the men's dorms.



The school sat on a hilltop and the view was incredible. The wind almost always blew so even though it was hot it was still comfortable.



The women got opportunities to take breaks at the beach. They went snorkeling (although the water was quite murky), they found pretty shells and were able to go in the water to cool off.

They had wonderful meals although some were “interesting”. Have you ever had iguana, king fish tails, or fungi? But the team was missing their junk food. Later in the week they got to go to town when they bought “half a van full” of junk food.

One night when they were finished working, around 8:00pm, they all went to the beach. Some of the men went in with their clothes and shoes on to rinse off all the concrete dust. Also, one time Ed got a “bath” of concrete.

Allie Strobe got to play nurse several times. She doctored injuries, sun burns, cuts and scrapes and loved doing it!



One Sunday after service they got to witness a baptism down in the ocean. The pastor was afraid he would run over two hours for his message and baptismal, but was done by 1:00pm: “No problem, mon!”

They were able to visit Coral World. There were exhibits that could be touched with living corals and anemones, sea urchins, and sea cucumbers along with a baby shark and sting ray they petted. The big highlight was an underwater observation room where there were snorkelers looking in at them while they were looking at the coral reef and beautiful fish.

After that they went to Audley's church where Becky sang a solo. Another time the whole group sang acapella at his church.



Audley taught them a new word, "Hugonized" which referred to anything that went through the hurricane, typewriters that didn't work, and their living room that had to be redone, etc. There was even a store they went to that was selling things that had been Hugonized.

There was a mon-goose living beside the driveway. They finally were able to get a picture of him.



While out to dinner one night they saw a submarine coming into the harbor along with many yachts and cargo ships. The full moon rising out of the sea was beautiful.

An unforgettable adventure was one evening after finishing up the work they went "touristing". While stopping at an overlook they encountered a scruffy looking guy with a burro. He wanted \$2.00 for them to take a picture of one of them sitting on a burro. They weren't interested but Jim was taking a video of the encounter which made the man very mad. He threw a big rock at the van and there was a threat of a machete so they just got out of there quickly!

Becky writes "It was an exciting trip. There was little time to enjoy the glories of God's creation, because as soon as we weren't working, we wanted to sleep, not walk. But sometimes we did walk and it was beautiful. It was wonderful to get personally acquainted with some "real missionaries" and rewarding to know that we've done something "concrete" for the Lord. We had a smooth flight home - "No problem, mon". Stopped for dinner - arrived at SABC about 8:30 - everyone went home to bed (ahhhhh - our own bed and bath, with no water shortage!!!!).

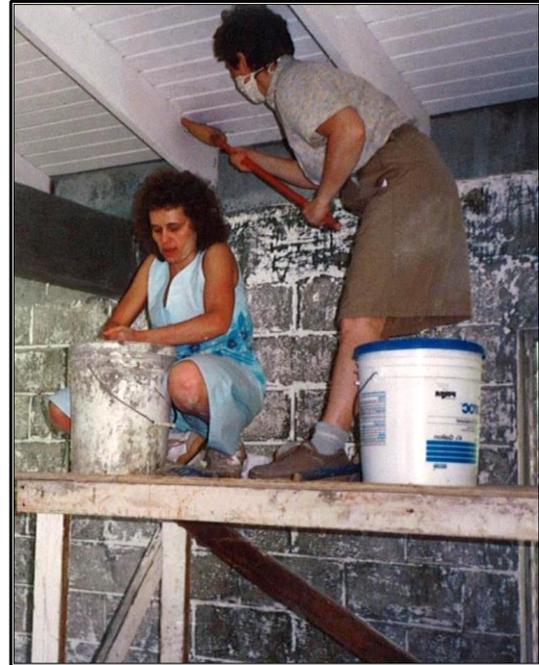


List of Accomplishments

Guys: Finished the cistern except the top sealer inside. In St. Thomas they put the top on first, then sealed the inside, moved 28 ton of cement blocks, sifted four cubic yards of sand, moved six cubic yard of dirt (with pick and shovel), loaded and unloaded (with shovels) three tons of sand, laid 1,200 blocks for building cisterns, moved 400 blocks down three stories (formed a "human chain" which included some gals), poured 36 tons of concrete in five gallon buckets, and Jim and Tom hung 30 sheets of drywall. Ed repaired three vehicles, sanded floors in one building, painted 1/2 ceiling, and broke one ladder.



Gals: Spackled and scrubbed five rooms which included one dining hall (Becky, Karlene and Lois defied gravity while performing this feat at times on nothing more than a narrow plank set on two rickety ladders), painted one room and one other ceiling, used 20 gallons of joint compound (with the help of another man), used eight gallons of paint, washed 480 panes of glass, and Allie and Judy dried dishes for 620 people.



A week later Pastor Walter received the following letter:

How can I say thank you? The group you sent down was absolutely perfect in every way. I've seen well over 200 people come here to help, but none like these. None compare in any way. Each one and I'll not list them, came to work and they did. There was more accomplished for our Lord while they were here than any other group. Often as they were in the middle of a project it became necessary for me to change things and they took it perfectly. Anyone from your church is so welcome here anytime. These men and women worked long and hard days and even til 10 at night and the only complaint was they wanted more to do. God bless each one. As in Psalms 23:6 "Surely goodness and mercy will follow each one all the days of their lives". God in heaven has a great reward for each of them. Surely He can only say "Well done thou good and faithful servant".
Thanks, again.

Serving Him Through You
Joe Yoder