



The day following our arrival in Santiago, we climbed into a bus and headed to a church about an hour away. Something magical (*or divine*) happened as we began the trip. Five young people boarded the bus carrying backpacks and a ukulele. They looked to be middle school age at best, but as they introduced themselves as our interpreters, we quickly learned that they actually ranged in age from 14 to 29, three of whom were the pastor's daughters. Cesia, the eldest sister (19 yrs.), asked if they could play the ukulele and sing. We said we'd be delighted. Those kids played and sang the most beautiful, harmonized Christian songs, in English, we had ever heard. It was truly the start of something special and a prelude of what was to come.

Learning the Lay of the Land

Our first Sunday we were welcomed into a very spartan Baptist church by some wonderful pastors, pastors' wives, interpreters and church workers. After a brief service we were fed brown rice and beans (a staple for Cuba), a fried chicken leg, cabbage, cucumbers, tomatoes, yucca and papaya, followed by a rendition of 'tres leches' cake. Salt, pepper and butter were scarce. Bottled water and orange Fanta drinks were freely offered and very welcome! People were extremely friendly and pleasant. It was a great start to the week and very importantly, we were able to meet and get to know our interpreters.



Each of us was assigned one interpreter who would remain with us during the entire week. These people were truly incredible and strongly Christian in their beliefs and commitments. All spoke very good English and the younger kids each played one or more musical instruments. It was common to have church services with the kids playing as we all sang. In one church, where the father of the three sisters was the pastor, four of the interpreters played the keyboard, lead and base guitars, and drums while three girls sang along with the band. This was extremely moving for all of us. That evening we returned to Santiago, inspired and ready to go. We dined at an open-air restaurant on fresh fish and chicken with, of course, rice.

The food, in general, was very good. Breakfast was served in the hotel, buffet style with many choices of cheese, salad, the equivalent of cold cuts, boiled eggs, omelets, fruit, French toast/hotcakes (with honey only, no syrup), "bacon" or sausage, and strong hot coffee with hot milk. Lunches during the week were served at 1:30 at the church of the day and were very similar to the first church's lunch. One day we did have fried pork, and ice cream was offered occasionally. Chicken soup was a real delicacy. Dinners were typically enjoyed at local, open-air restaurants where pork, fish, shrimp, chicken, rabbit and goat were the main courses with rice and beans, and salad. Beef is typically not available to the public. No such thing as French fries, and only once we were served small potatoes. Rice came in four colors/types....brown with beans, white, yellow and fried. Quite a variety! All in all the food was very good. A couple of nights we ate some Italian food which included pizza, also good.....along with Fanta and Coca-Cola.

Doing the Real Mission Work

Over the course of four days, Monday through Thursday, we would travel to small villages west of Santiago, arriving by 9:00 and leaving by 4:00 in the afternoon. Each day we would meet up with our interpreters and local church workers with assignments for the day.

Typically we had 6 to 10 houses planned to visit and this was changed “on the fly” by our church workers. These church workers had previously visited the neighborhoods and had received approval from households for our visit.



The church workers were truly inspirational people as well. Usually one or two ladies would travel with us and our interpreters, house to house for about five hours, stopping for 30 to 45 minutes per home. Poorly graded dirt roads and trails led us from house to house. Houses were little more than shelters from the sun and rain. The people whom we visited were very poor but clean, and very proud of their neighborhood. It was common to visit with one

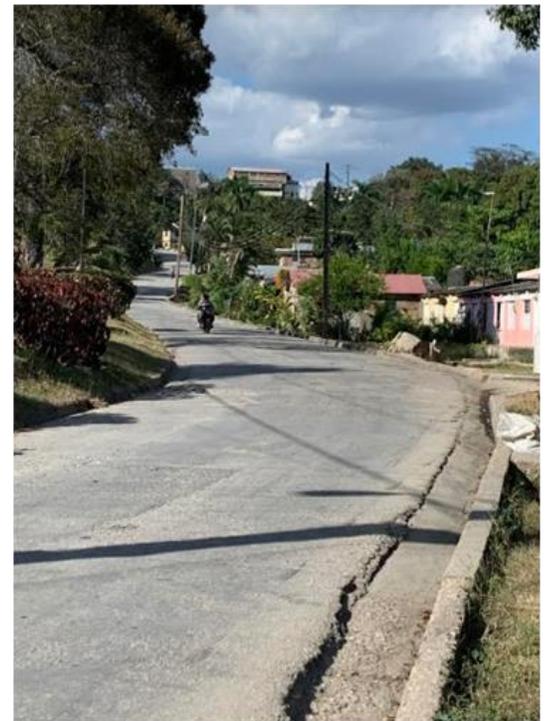
or two women, rarely any men, and at times groups of 6 to 8 people would gather to hear what we had to say.

Many personal and spiritual moments were encountered during these visits and the church workers were incredibly helpful at all times. We gave each of our helpers gifts of simple things that are not readily available in Cuba. These included shampoo, soap, toilet paper, candy for kids, band aids, antiseptic, toothbrushes and toothpaste, wash cloths and other minor things we take for granted. They gave us local fruit in return...such gracious people. Many personal stories came from these visits, too many to discuss here. But, all of us were spiritually affected by these visits. The Lord's presence was strongly felt and our words seemed to simply come forth as we spoke. No doubt He was speaking through us, and we were deeply moved.

Daily Life in Cuba



As for their daily life, horse- and oxen-drawn two-wheeled carts were common transportation in the countryside. There were few paved roads, except for the major roads connecting villages and neighborhoods. Vintage American cars and trucks from the 1940's and 1950's were prevalent with Russian diesel engines billowing black smoke powering them. Motorcycles (with sidecars), cyclo-taxis and horse-drawn buggies were typical transportation in the cities, along with many buses, both modern and ancient. Streets were kept perpetually clean in all major urban areas and beautiful flowers were common in the medians, perfectly trimmed.



Our hotels were spartan, by American standards, but they had hot and cold non-potable (undrinkable) water, flush toilets, window AC units and clean beds. The one thing common to almost all areas, restaurants, hotels, churches and homes, was ...*uncomfortable* chairs! Virtually

all of us complained about the seating the whole week. We are spoiled here in the U.S. in many ways, and our fannies are too!

Thursday evening we had a nice dinner to honor our interpreters at a local outdoor restaurant. It was the last time we would see them and we exchanged gifts and goodbyes. This was very emotional as well. When you spend five days in remote Cuba with someone and together talking to people about the Bible, you get very close and feel an unspoken bond with them.



The Journey Home

On Friday we returned to Holguin for our flight the next day. We left in the morning from Santiago and arrived early enough to drive straight to the beaches about 45 minutes north of Holguin. We had a nice seafood lunch overlooking beautiful clear blue waters of the Caribbean and spent a much-needed hour or so walking on the beach and relaxing. We hadn't realized how draining, both mentally and physically, the last few days had been for us. We were so pumped up spiritually by our experiences, the Cuban people and by the good Lord, we didn't realize how worn out we were.



After a fair night's rest in a Russian hotel in Holguin, we headed for the airport, with a short stop in downtown Holguin for some shopping. All bought something; anything from cigars to curios to remember Cuba by. There was not much to choose from but we all felt we had to buy something. At the airport we spent two hours getting through customs and checking luggage, then waited six hours for a late airplane. With only one runway, we could easily watch nothing land for a long time. Finally our rescue plane landed and we were off after another 30-minute delay in boarding. It seemed we were the only ones in a hurry. At the end of a short flight to Miami, we landed once more in the chaos of the Miami airport. Another interesting customs experience and some lost luggage saw us finally leave Miami to arrive back in DFW at 1:00 AM Sunday. By 4:00 AM we were all home and glad to be there.

However, we brought back so many wonderful memories of Cuba, its people, our spiritual experiences and our friends; the trip will be unforgettable. We are very grateful to the White Bluff Chapel for sponsoring us and praying for us. We hope that we brought at least one person to Jesus Christ during our trip. That would make the entire adventure all worthwhile!