

SIFAT Journal

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Sharing God's Love in Practical Ways

September 2008

An Experience of a Lifetime

By Olivia Singleton
Intern to Ixiamas, Bolivia

How do you begin to sum up an experience of a lifetime in a few short paragraphs? There is no way I can fully explain the impact this summer had on me, or the beauty of Bolivia and her people in a few short sentences, but I will try.

Going to Bolivia I was frightened. Scared of all I would miss at home, afraid I would not fit in and that my Spanish would never improve. I was so afraid that my excitement could not peek through, even as I boarded the plane. The Lord in his perfect timing and his perfect will knew this was exactly the

place I needed to be. Flying into LaPaz is beauty beyond description, and I was instantly filled with a peace that can come only from the Lord. What started out as broken was restored to fullness.

Arriving in Ixiamas, I was in a place where all I could do was to learn and allow myself to be loved. Throughout the course of the summer my Spanish did improve, and while I missed home, it was nothing compared to the ache that would fill my heart as I prepared to leave Bolivia.

While in Ixiamas, we worked on the new building, built a new stove and a ferro-cement tank, but those are not



Olivia (back row: second from right) and three others from the Wesley Foundation at Auburn University spent their summer in Ixiamas, Bolivia, at our boarding home. the memories I have taken home with me. I see the faces of beautiful children

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Two Summers at SIFAT

By Leslie Loyd
Learn & Serve Counselor



Leslie (left) and her SPEAR group cook lunch using an appropriate technology cook stove. Leslie has served as a Learn & Serve counselor during the past two summers.

It is hard to put into words what the last two years of working at Learn & Serve (L&S) has come to mean to me. It has been so meaningful to meet youth and leaders from all over the country and watch them fall in love with SIFAT. Even more importantly, watching them begin to embrace a calling to be a servant in their communities and around the world. It is difficult to pinpoint when and where they begin to fall in love. It could be the fellowship of working alongside complete strangers to meet a

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A Look Inside Learn & Serve

“What will my youth do at Learn & Serve?” is a question often asked by youth leaders when they call Learn & Serve (L&S) director Jamie Waldhour. As Jamie tries to briefly explain the week that is L&S, it becomes clear that to understand, you should experience it. A total of 472 participants from 32 churches in seven states did find out what L&S is all about during our eight week-long sessions this summer.

Church groups pulled onto our campus every Sunday afternoon, where they were greeted by counselors chasing them down on bicycles - their energy becoming infectious. After unpacking and beating the ropes course, dinner, orientation and worship followed.

Mondays introduced “the grain game”. Nathan Dekrey, 15, from Winter Springs, Fla., said this was his favorite part of L&S because it showed the many advantages and disadvantages in the world—“if we all shared, we could all feed each other.” During the grain game, students role played countries and had to suffer through famine, war and other obstacles, but sometimes were helped by the “United Nations” or trade with another country. Through this game, world hunger statistics became realistic.

Monday nights took students to our Urban Slums in the Global Village. Mason Dillard, 12, of Orlando, Fla., shared that the slums were one of his favorite times because they were realistic and caused him to think. Jennifer Chavez, 14, from Houston, Texas, said that a familiar quote came

alive through the slums - “live simply so others can simply live.” Jennifer also said, “Sometimes we do not want to drink out of the tap, but now I’m thankful we have it, and we don’t have to boil it.”

Appropriate technology was put into practice on Tuesdays when lunch was made using cookstoves. Thinking about appropriate technologies and having a little experience under their belts prepared everyone for Tuesday night, when a long hike and customs checkpoint led to the Village Experience.



Students participating in Learn & Serve work together on the ropes course.

As Julie Harrison, 16, from Oviedo, Fla., said, “it’s not a big jump the next day. You’re already there.” On Wednesdays, L&S participants lived in the Global Village. They were on the receiving end of a mission team (volunteers and staff providing a soup kitchen). Supper was purchased at a market and cooked over an open fire.

Thursdays took L&S participants into our local community to serve by doing a variety of mission projects. From

working in the nursing home to teaching children at day camps and helping an organization serving families who are dealing with grief, our local community was blessed by students, chaperones and our staff.

Daily quiet time, small group devotions and worship services were mixed with these activities. And somehow, everyone still found time to play in the creek, swim in the pond or join in games at the Lodge.

As Nathan explained, “Let me tell you about SIFAT...I go there, I learn about the world. I’m ready to go anywhere. I became more active in my community last year, and now I can go back and become broader.”

Jenna Mitchell, 19, from Charleston, S.C., came as an adult chaperone. She loved the setup of L&S because it is applicable. “You feel like coming home,” Jenna said, “The counselors don’t feel like they’ve been trained; they just welcome you and naturally want you to love it.” She says the slum and village tested her physically, emotionally and spiritually. She already sees changes in her youth’s outlook.

The theme for L&S 2008 was Three Sixty, which challenged teens to look at the rest of the year after L&S. Counselors encouraged students to return to their communities and immediately start using the tools they have learned.

If you are interested in bringing a youth group for a retreat or L&S 2009, contact Jamie Waldhour, waldhourj@sifat.org.

Olivia

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who are being given the opportunity to learn because of the faithfulness of SIFAT. I remember the dance parties after dinner with the older girls, dancing to music I did not understand, but knowing it was glorifying to the Lord. My favorite memories are centered around the river—washing clothes, bathing before the kids went to school, swimming, fishing, catching crabs and talking about life.

I have left a place full of family, and I hope all of my friends in Bolivia know they have family in the states. My prayer is to be reunited with my brothers and sisters, and I know in God's perfect timing, I will.

Visit SIFAT's Campus

Fall is a great time to bring a group on a tour of SIFAT. The heat of summer lessens, and plenty of activity keeps you interested. Sunday school classes, civic clubs and others are welcome to tour our campus on Thursdays. Remember to wear comfortable walking shoes, and contact Haley Lewis, lewish@sifat.org, to schedule your group. Reservations are required.



Campus Director Nate Paulk (right) tours a group from Alabama Power Service Organization on a rainy day. This group braved the weather to see our Global Village. Some members of the group escaped the rain by standing under our banana trees.

Leslie

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variety of goals, from a challenging ropes course to boiling water over an open fire after a hard rain. It could be in the incredible worship that takes place constantly in little things like seeing a cool bug and thanking God for His creativity or the more structured devotionals and singing our heart outs in joy for all the blessings that have been poured out on us. It could be through the countless opportunities of service and hard work that we are given.

One way or another, these people are changed. You can hear it in their prayers for the hungry, the passion with which they begin to praise God and the excitement they feel when thinking about what their youth group can do for their community. It is so amazing to hear the stories of how many youth have gone home and begun to change their homes, their churches, schools and world through this new revolution of love.

I have noticed in my own life that it is very difficult not to see the world through different glasses. To be in awe of how easy it is to boil water to make dinner and inevitably think of the billions of people that are looking for firewood to begin making their dinner and the millions who won't have anything to eat. As I go to work and school I thank God for the abilities and opportunities He has given me. I also seem to realize how many blessings are poured on me every day and to praise God even for things that I might have been upset about before. Life has become constant joy, no matter what the circumstance. I owe so much of my new outlook to SIFAT and how God is working there. As I leave the summer and all the experiences of L&S, I vow to practice what I preach and wake up each morning asking God how I can serve with Him.

The Practicum students are here!

Orientation began the last week of August, and classes started Sept. 1. Although students are busy during the week, you are invited to adopt them on the weekends.

For more information, contact international training director Kathy Bryson, brysonk@sifat.org.

Read next month's Journal for stories about this year's students!



SIFAT Remembers...

As SIFAT approaches our 30th year of sharing God's love in practical ways, cofounders Ken and Sarah Corson are writing this column to focus on accomplishments, struggles and important moments from past years. Ken is posting bonus material on our blog, too. We hope you enjoy remembering these years with us!

In the early days of SIFAT there were few questions I disliked more than, "What's your doctrine?" As people began to hear of SIFAT, many were both cautious and curious to know something about it. We, of course, wanted to tell them. However, some people were more concerned with our doctrine, than with what we were doing. While this is a legitimate question, it was often asked in the spirit of building a wall to shut us out if our doctrine was not the same as theirs.

After looking at orthodox creeds, statements and professions, we decided that these had been instruments that were often the source of conflict in the history of Christianity. We did not want to accept or reject statements that meant so much to so many, nor did we want to have no firm ground to stand on. We wanted to work with people to incarnate God's love in real tangible ways without being separated by doctrines and theologies. We came to accept the statement "Sharing God's love in practical ways" as our banner. Whatever Christian tradition people accepted we hoped that most could agree on sharing God's love. The addition of the phrase, "in practical ways" focused us on real needs for this life and states a major feature and

The Ring of Truth

uniqueness of Servants in Faith and Technology.

J.B. Phillips, the Anglican priest and translator of the New Testament, wrote a book entitled, *The Ring of Truth*. There have been times when Sarah and I personally, and SIFAT institutionally, have been guided by a suggestion or an idea that was outside traditional parameters and did not provide a proven path to follow. Some of the choices were made because they had that "ring of truth." SIFAT has always had people of diverse Christian traditions, and we have been able to work together. Over the years, SIFAT has had people from all major races, many tribal groups, at least 80 countries and a large variety of Christian Church groups representing different and diverse beliefs, doctrines and perspectives. Others who were not Christians were welcomed at SIFAT, too, provided they respected our principles while with us. If we served only one nationality, race or religious group, we could not have become SIFAT. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. We have found that freedom and expressed it in our motto, *Sharing God's Love in Practical Ways*, because it has the *Ring of Truth*.

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to have a percentage of your purchase donated to SIFAT.

Researching online? Use www.goodsearch.com to conduct online searches, choose SIFAT as your charity, and GoodSearch donates to SIFAT.

Upcoming STM Trips

Our last teams of the year are serving in Bolivia and Ecuador during October. Please pray for them as they prepare to share God's love in practical ways.

Bolivia:

October 2 - 16 Auburn UMC

Ecuador:

October 19 - 26 Cayambe Medical

New projects will be started in Ecuador in 2009, and **eight medical teams are needed** to serve in various areas of the country. Contact Peggy Walker, perdidopeg@aol.com, if you are interested in serving on a team or leading one from your church.

SIFAT Journal



50 Years Later

Special Guests

By Peggy Walker
International Team Coordinator



SIFAT cofounders Ken and Sarah Corson celebrated 50 years of marriage on Aug. 22, 2008. Many of their friends and family joined them in celebrating at SIFAT on Aug. 16.

Earlier this year, SIFAT executive director Tom Corson and I were privileged to visit the Holy Land with North Alabama UMC pastors Bill Etheridge and Terry Hill as our guides.

After the tour, Terry arranged for us to spend an additional five days as guests at the Bethlehem Bible College to work on a service project in Jerusalem. Rev. Alex Awad, dean of students, pastor, author and noted authority on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was our host. Our project was to paint the inside of the East Jerusalem Baptist Church, where he is pastor.

On a recent lecture and book signing trip to the United States, Rev. Alex and his wife Brenda accepted our invitation to visit SIFAT to tour the campus and speak to our Practicum students about the conflict in his homeland. He gave powerful insight into what life is really like for Arab Christians living behind the wall in Bethlehem, a far different picture than we hear in the media.

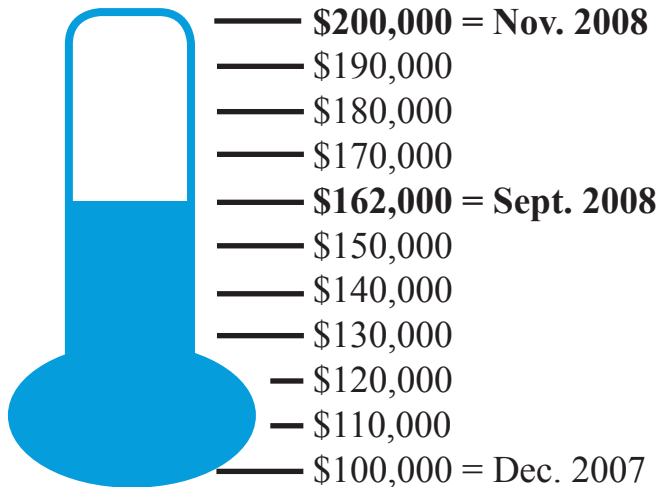
After speaking to the group, Alex signed copies of his most recent book, *Palestinian Memories: The Story of a Palestinian Mother and Her People*, which shares the story of his family and the background for the current Arab-Israeli conflict.

Alex and Brenda invited the SIFAT students to visit them in Bethlehem and hope to encourage their students to apply to our Practicum. I will also be exploring with Brenda the possibility of bringing SIFAT teams to work at the Bethlehem Bible College in the future.

Fundraising Opportunity: 2009 Calendars

Order your calendars now! SIFAT calendars are a great way for churches and teams to raise money for missions and for SIFAT. Contact Marie, lanierm@sifat.org, to order calendars or for more information.

Sarah Trust Fund Update



To contribute to the Sarah Trust Fund, please write "Sarah Fund" in the memo field of your check.



Peggy Walker (center), international team coordinator, welcomes Rev. Alex Awad and his wife Brenda to SIFAT's campus.

Alex shared his personal story of being a missionary to his own people.



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SIFAT's Vision: Bridging the First and Two-thirds Worlds to alleviate spiritual and physical poverty, encouraging people to develop their God-given potential.

SIFAT's Mission: To share God's love through service, education and personal involvement with a needy world.

From the Desk of Tom Corson

By Sarah Corson
SIFAT Cofounder

Tom is with a team in Bolivia helping string cable across the Chayanta River for the bridge which will give many people in other villages access to the Quesimpuco church, school and hospital. I have the opportunity to use his space to greet you, and especially to thank you who have supported the Sarah Fund. This fund could be called the Founder's Fund, because it is an effort by the founders of SIFAT—both Ken and I and founding board members—to help SIFAT continue into a future far beyond us.

Today we are in the midst of our fall Practicum with 16 students from 10 countries. Each day as I teach, I am thrilled to get to share with Christians so eager to take this training back to their people. Before Tom left, he and Dyla had the students over for a cookout. Igor and Elena, our first students from the Ukraine, walked around Tom's home noting each detail of the construction. Then Igor asked, "Where does your dirty water go?" Ben, an American going to serve in the Middle East, remarked to me, "I am learning to think cross culturally just by being with these other students. We just take clean water and sanitation for granted and would never think of asking a host where his dirty water goes!" The question gave Tom an opportunity to

explain how our septic tanks work in rural areas. Igor was learning even from a social visit.

And there is Constance from Nigeria—how she can sing and dance to the Lord! She is a leader who succeeded in bringing together 33 women from different churches and countries to help each other reach marginalized women and children in their countries. An author of more than half a dozen inspirational books, Constance inspires us all daily!

Each year as more Christian leaders take our training and return to put it into practice, we are humbly grateful to God for giving us SIFAT as a channel through which we all can make a difference in our world. The witness of Christian leaders who return to their countries, continues to multiply our efforts. This year the Ukrainian students represent the 81st country where our graduates have returned to serve.

As Ken and I get older, how we praise God for our younger staff who are true to the original vision God gave us for SIFAT, and yet who take SIFAT far beyond what we envisioned, to include the needs of this generation today. And the next generation will have other, perhaps even greater, needs. That is why we have the Sarah Fund. Again, Ken and I want to say thank you to all of you who participate in this vision with us!