



SIFAT

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From

Glimpses of God
...in the Lives of the Poor

By Sarah Corson
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Water for Marcos

Twenty-five years ago we moved to a remote village in Bolivia. The only available water was the creek at the edge of the town. Everyone bathed in it, washed their clothes in it, and dumped their garbage in it. This creek was the water source and garbage dump for all the other villages in the mountains above us. Most of the people did not understand the danger of polluted water.

One day a distraught neighbor came pleading for help for her year-old baby, Marcos. He had diarrhea and was vomiting. "A baby can't last long here in the tropics like that," she declared. She was desperate. "During the rice harvest last year," she told us, "I had another baby the same age as this one is now. One day she started vomiting and the next day she was dead. I have a little grave to prove that babies cannot stay sick long and live. What can I do?"

I had no medical training. At that time we did not even know about oral rehydration therapy, the water-sugar-salt drink that keeps one from dehydration. I took the only thing I had--a bottle of Pepto Bismol--and followed to her home. Little Marcos lay on a straw mat on the dirt floor, burning with fever. He took half a teaspoon of medicine.

While he nursed, I asked the mother about their water. Their only water source was the creek. We knew how contaminated the creek was.

"If you would boil the water before the children drink it, you could kill many of the germs before they make the children sick," I told her. As long as I live I will never forget the look on that woman's face. As she sat there on a pile of wood gathered for cooking, she motioned to her pot, blackened from the smoke of the open fire.

"That's the only pot I have, Sister. In the mornings I cook in it for the whole day. I have to go to the fields with my husband. The food for the day stays in the pot. There is no place else to put it. Oh, if only I had a pot to boil water in! Maybe my little girl would not have died last year."

How can we teach people to boil polluted water when they have no pot? Marcos recovered, but a month later the vomiting and diarrhea reoccurred and he died. We were deeply motivated to find a solution for clean water for our village.

Ken and Benjo, the village leader, started CENATEC, a Bolivian Christian agency out of which SIFAT later grew. Their first project was to bring in a clean water system for our village. The effect of Marcos' death lives on today as SIFAT/CENATEC continue to reach other communities with clean water for the body--and with Christ, the Water of Life, for the spirit.