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From Witchcraft to Worker for Christ

By Sarah Corson

SIFAT Co-founder

In 1994, SIFAT began training Christian workers at El Renuevo in Venezuela. Several years later, we had to close it because of terrorists in nearby Colombia, who had begun coming into Venezuela and kidnaping Americans for ransom.

This summer, Yurima Alvarez, one of our El Renuevo graduates, came to SIFAT to teach youth during our Learn & Serve Summer Experience and to learn more technologies to help her people during this difficult time in Venezuela. She brought us news from a number of SIFAT's graduates from those years we worked in Venezuela. Yurima encouraged us, telling us that the SIFAT training was still going on in different areas of Venezuela, as our graduates with whom we had lost contact were still training others using the skills and knowledge that they learned more than 25 years ago. One especially caught my attention.

"Remember Oscar?" she asked. We could never forget Oscar! He was from the Yanomani, deep in the jungles bordering the Orinoco River. His tribe still dressed in the ancient loin cloth, but he got clothes like we wear to come to the SIFAT training sessions. They were still hunter-gatherers and did not know how to farm. Their tribe was in danger of dying out because their hunting and fishing territory was becoming smaller and smaller as homesteaders were pushing into the area. The Orinoco River was becoming polluted from the oil drilling companies.

Their government allowed the indigenous to be teachers in

their villages if they had passed the 8th grade. Oscar was the first one in his village who accomplished this, so he became principal of the public school in his home village. At our training center, he wanted to learn how to garden and how to raise chickens to try to help feed his people. They could no longer exist with the small fish left in the river or small animals they could capture.



Sarah and Oscar spend time together at El Renuevo in Venezuela many years ago.

I have never forgotten the testimony he gave one morning in devotions. "My people did not know God when I was a child," he began. "My father is the witch doctor in our village, and my grandfather was before him. Of the seven children in my family, my father chose me to carry on the tradition of being the shaman. He began to train me when I was about five."

"But a missionary came to the next village and was learning our language. When my oldest

brother visited that village, he became a Christian. He told me not to follow witchcraft. When I was 11, I went to that village, so that I could study. My father did not want me to learn to read, but my brother convinced him to let me go. Every day I studied and learned the things in the Bible that the missionary taught us."

"The God my people worship is the devil, because they are afraid of him. The evil in the world is all they can see. They were afraid of all people who were not of our tribe. My father made poisonous arrows with which our people killed any stranger that came into our territory."

"But when I heard of Jesus, I knew there must be a good God. I believed the Bible was true. I became a Christian. I told my

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father I would never work with witchcraft again.”

“I came here to study at SIFAT/El Renuevo because my village heard about this appropriate technology, and they asked me to come and learn it to teach them. I am glad to learn these things, but I am homesick. I will be glad to get back to the jungle.”

Then, he asked us to pray for his father to become a Christian. Since Oscar had become a Christian, his father had quit making poisonous arrows and killing people. “But I want him to give up the rest of witchcraft and follow Jesus,” he said. “I love my father. Please pray for him.”

He concluded with a statement that was somewhat shocking, but great to hear. “I can invite you to visit our village now,” he explained. “We won’t kill you anymore.” That day, I felt a tremendous joy to hear firsthand how the power of God can completely transform a child of the jungle brought up in witchcraft.

However, when Yurima told me what Oscar is doing now, my joy was even greater! He is the head chief of the villages in his area. Not only has he taught his people about Jesus, but also how to garden and raise their animals, so that they are no longer hungry. Many of his people have become Christians. Oscar has started a missionary project, and the village Christians are part of it, too. They take the message of Jesus and His love much deeper into the jungle to other villages that have never heard, teaching these previously unreached people both the spiritual and physical things he learned at SIFAT.

I am so thankful that when SIFAT had to quit working in



This was the church SIFAT graduate Saturnino pastored on the Caparro River in Venezuela in the 90s. Yurima shared that both Oscar and Saturino still use what they learned from SIFAT in the “Where there is no doctor” class, since trained medical personnel are far away, and there are no roads to these remote communities on the rivers.

Venezuela, the seeds that had been planted in the minds and hearts of our graduates grew and continued to produce fruit. Yurima brought us the news that the integrated Gospel of Jesus Christ to body and soul is still being taught by a number of our graduates in her country, which needs it now more than ever. Thank God that neither terrorists nor war nor corruption in high places nor hunger nor any other thing can stop the work of the Spirit of God!

Thank you for supporting SIFAT this month. Because of you, people like Oscar and Yurima continue *Sharing God’s Love in Practical Ways* years after their initial SIFAT training.

— Welcome David Rojas —



David Rojas is the new farm administrator at our Central American Training Center in Costa Rica. David is a SIFAT graduate from Guatemala who graduated from the national agricultural university in Honduras and has also interned on our campus in Alabama.

— Welcome Campus Staff —



We are excited to welcome Kaitlyn Glenn to our campus staff as our L&S programming assistant. Our two current interns, Tyler Collins and Madison Gnoose, will be serving on our campus, while they learn more about SIFAT and international community development! Pictured left to right: Kaitlyn, Tyler, Madison, Josiah Corson and Shelby Dickey.