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BELIZE 1987-2007

August 8, 1987... that's when this newlywed couple landed in Belize with many of our belongings packed in a Jeep Cherokee. (The rest were stored in a trailer in Texas – most of which became rain-damaged – or tucked away on a ship that never arrived in Belize! Amazing how much you can learn to do without!) Our first assignment: Acres of Love Children's Home, where we spent a year helping with education and maintenance as well as generally getting acquainted with missionary life. Thus began our 20-year time of service in Belize.

The road has not always been smooth – plenty of ups and downs and rocks and floods and potholes (literally and figuratively!). But the Lord Jesus Christ has always been there to guide us on His path. And He has let us know – in our hearts and confirmed by others – that it is a time for "new shoes" and a new assignment. It's time to trade in our muddy jungle boots for shiny new shoes! We'll fill you in on the details in a bit, but won't you put on your walking shoes and take a stroll with us down Memory Lane? (*Warning: wading boots may be needed on parts of this lane.*)



Flooded road to Boom Creek Village, 2000. Men try to free two stuck buses (loaded with supplies) while our children enjoy the water!

Early Years



Bobby's ministry often has been very practical – like fixing a bus engine while sharing the gospel!

The years 1988–1993 found us occupied with teaching school and mechanics and pastoring a small church in Jacintoville, southern Belize. Two new converts at that time, Dorma & John Young, have remained dear friends and powerful witnesses of the gospel. Praise God for lasting fruit!

While showing the "Jesus" film in 1990, Bobby met the pastor of a tiny village on the Moho River. A one-time visit was not enough – Pastor Santos urged Bobby to come and preach to his Spanish congregation. We began regular trips to Boom Creek Village, six miles down river in a dug-out "dory" boat – since there were no roads to the village in those days!



Our barge on the Moho River – dock for dories and safe spot for swimmers

We were hooked. the villagers invited live among them, place for us in the Boom Creek Village personal ministry, build a new church coordinate the Gorda Town; set up establish the first and only school in the village (which is still being run as a private, Christian school). It was amazing to watch the hand of the Lord achieve all these things and more! We could write volumes about how the Lord has provided.



Living Word School in Boom Creek Village

When us to Bobby enlisted help and began carving out a rain forest. During our 9-year sojourn in (1993-2001), we did a lot of preaching, and practical helps, such as help the village and register it with the Belize government; construction of an all-weather road to Punta a village government; host teams; and

The most important achievement, though, is relationships and the impact we have for the gospel. So much happened to shape lives during our early years in Belize! First of all, we thank God for **our children** – all three K'ek'chi Maya, born in Belize, and brought to us in their own unique way. We are so grateful for them and know

Then and now:
Elizabeth
 (top left),
Alicia
 (right) and
Caleb
 (front & center)



...turning point...

that the Lord has incredible plans to use them in His kingdom.

Summer 1996, shortly after beginning Living Word School, we were introduced to **Shiloh Christian Ministries** when fellow missionary Wayne Johnston brought a team to construct a school building in Boom Creek Village. We fell in love with the pastor and people of Shiloh and in time they agreed to become our spiritual covering and home church.

The arrival of Hurricane Mitch in October 1998 proved to be a turning point for our ministry. During relief efforts in Honduras, Bobby met Frank Plett, a Mennonite brother from **Spanish Lookout** in western Belize. Through his hunger for the Lord, Frank became a vital link for the future of our ministry, starting with him spending six weeks voluntarily building a road for Boom Creek Village. Frank repeatedly invited us to Spanish Lookout to teach his people about the Holy Spirit, but the time was not right until we had ministered in Guatemala...



Above: Bobby & Frank
Left: Hector & Evelyn

Guatemala



Gib & Joanne Simpson – leaders in ACSI – with Bobby & Denise, 2001

The door opened for us to live and minister in **Guatemala** in 2001 when we were invited to work with ACSI (Association of Christian Schools International). This opportunity came ten years after the language and people of Guatemala first became endeared to our hearts – in 1991 we had spent five months learning Spanish there, getting to know dedicated people such as Hector and Evelyn Argueta, Guatemalan believers who remain dear friends today.



Though we lived in Guatemala for less than a year in 2001, this time was very significant. First, we began the OBI **Sponsorship Program** after visiting two exceptional ACSI-member Christian schools, Bethania (Guatemala) and Jehova Jireh (Honduras).



Students of Bethania School

Furthermore, walking the streets of Guatemala City, Bobby felt compelled to **feed the street children** of Guatemala, which is why OBI supports ministries like Potter's House which help children in desperate need.



Finally, Bobby realized that his ministry focus was to be to "wounded soldiers" - believers like Frank and others who had been wounded by the church. In 2002, we accepted Frank's invitation to live in Spanish Lookout and teach his people about the delivering power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Later Years

As we look back over the past five years with the **Mennonites in Spanish Lookout**, it is amazing to think about all the Lord has done. It has been a most challenging, rewarding time! While our goal was to bring revival to the traditional Mennonite church, the elders rejected us as "outsiders" and excommunicated those who desired to walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit! Nevertheless, a growing group of believers congregates for the praise and glory of God – just like early believers in the book of Acts who came out of the synagogues to follow the way of Jesus Christ. Praise the Lord!

Really, we don't have room in this letter to say how much the people of Spanish Lookout have meant to us nor how much the Lord has done in their midst. They have become like family, (so we've included a lot of "family"



Bobby with great friend Cornie Dueck, pastor and political leader from Sp. Lkt. who survived near-fatal car crash last year



Above: 2003 - One of first baptisms at Mennonite Beach, Belize River



2007 - Installation of senior elders Harvey & Rosella Plett by elders Jack & Rose Dueck, Elmer & Doris Plett, visiting pastor John Froese, elders Klaas & Greta Friesen, and Albert & Shirley Penner

portraits on this page and the next)! When the Lord spoke to our hearts that our time in Belize was fulfilled and confirmed it to us through others, it was tough to pick up and go. But we know that in order to stay in the will of God, we have to obey.



Denise enjoyed working with Jireh school in Spanish Lookout. Staff L to R: Principal Corny Dyck; teacher Wallace Edwards Jr.; co-founder John Friesen (miraculously recovered from a terrible motorcycle accident, 12/05); founder/administrator Tina Friesen Perez, a woman of great vision



Pastor Julio (left) & brothers from Spanish church are grateful for Bobby's expertise in changing the engine in their truck, a.k.a. church bus



Ladies of the prayer group gathered to help Denise prepare for our trip. The ladies' group continues meeting for Bible study and prayer, for the glory of God.

Right:

June 2007 - Prayer for Jireh's first high-school graduate, whom Denise taught for two years



Left: Bobby shares at Fountain of Life, the church in Sp. Lkt. that developed from the Bible study started when we arrived in 2002



Thanksgiving 2006 - a lovely variety of beautiful Belizeans in our Spanish Lookout home

Recent answers to prayer:

- o A **Pastor** has been needed for Fountain of Life Church in Spanish Lookout – the Lord has established local leadership and in June sent Rich & Rachel Deeds of Pennsylvania to assist them.
- o **Blanca Alvarado** returned to Belize after cancer treatment in Ohio. She receives follow-up care in Belize and is grateful to all who helped her! Through the generosity of many, the OBI fund remains open to help Blanca with medical costs.

Right: Blanca with skin cancer in left sinus & into hairline, November 2006



Above: After 4 months of surgery & treatment in US, Blanca rejoices she can live to raise her daughters



Above: Blanca back in Belize with husband Joshua and daughters Tanya & Jennifer, March 2007

Right: A happy Blanca with new teeth, new glasses, new stove, and a new lease on life



- o **Bobby's shoulder and back** feel the best they have in years! Driving through Mexico in June did not even bother him.
- o **Sensitivity to the Lord's voice** – thanks to all who have been praying for us! At the end of February, after much prayer and counsel, the Dickens agreed that the Lord is giving us a new assignment and that our time of living in Belize is complete. Though called to the nations, our hearts are now drawn to our home church, Shiloh Christian Ministries, where we can receive training in discipleship and be with people who have the fire of God burning, so we can take His light to the world! When inquiring of our mission board, Pastor Ray Miller (who has been to Belize several times with us) responded as follows:

Of course I'm sorry because I love that gone I may never

(That's an honest confession of selfishness!)

Seriously.... You folks have impacted that nation for God. forever changed because of your dedicated commitment Lookout has had your continual input as they opened their Spirit-filled. You have done a great job in Belize. Even cooperation you received "fluctuated" occasionally, you bonus blessing and reward, God gave you a family! A blessing for a lifetime. God bless you for impacting so many lives for Him.



Pastor Ray Miller, OBI Vice President

you are leaving Belize place and if you are get to return.

Boom Creek will be there. Spanish lives to becoming though the remained solid. As a

It is necessary for God's soldiers to withdraw from the battlefield periodically to refresh and re-fire. I so appreciate what you folks have done and are doing for the Kingdom! And there is NO doubt that God will lead you two into ripened harvest fields. When the time is "right" God will lead you into new areas of conquest to conquer. I believe God will lead you into areas where the two of you can both use your unique and individual giftings to the maximum.

And Now...

In June we made the transition to Sierra Vista, Arizona, in our green & white bus that Bobby efficiently converted into a motor home!

With each move during our 20 years of missionary work, we've thought, "Wow, the spiritual warfare has really increased in this new location!" It is no different now that we are in the USA. Spiritual opposition has been intense. On July 15, Bobby landed in the hospital for 9 days with fever from a severe urinary tract infection and prostatitis. Thank the Lord for a caring doctor who persisted in finding the problem and a solution. By mid-August, Bobby felt well enough to make a trip to minister with his sister Betty to a friend in need; but the day before his departure, he began again with fever and chills. In prayer, the Lord spoke to his heart: "Once you step foot in that place, your symptoms will disappear." It was a fearful thing for Bobby to step out, but he did – and the Lord was true to His word. The moment Bobby arrived, all the fever, chills, and pressure lifted! Furthermore, he and Betty enjoyed watching the Lord minister to our friend in phenomenal ways! God is faithful!



Steve Fairfield of Shiloh (left) flew to Belize and accompanied us through Mexico to Arizona in our motor home (below) – June 12-18, 2007



Above: Alicia & Caleb, in uniform for first day of school at Shiloh, in front of the home the Lord provided us at 816 Cardinal Ave. Elizabeth (far right) visited us in July and is continuing high-school studies in Ohio.



What will we be doing in Arizona? We feel very much on-call and on missionary assignment here. There is much work to be done for the kingdom of God! Prayer is a #1 priority. Involvement in Shiloh's "Vision of the Harvest" provides us with training in discipleship. Our pastor has taken personal interest in our well-being, and we are excited to be learning from the leadership. Church services have been rich and wonderful, and we look forward to what more the Lord will have

for us as we remain on-call to His assignments.

Be assured, our involvement in Belize has not ended. The church in Spanish Lookout is growing; development of the Ag Project continues under the supervision of Frank Plett; students are still being supported through the OBI Sponsorship Program; and the list goes on. We covet your continued prayer and financial support during our personal time of transition. Thank you, and God bless you with all riches in Christ Jesus our Lord!!!

In Christ's service,

Bobby & Denise

Bobby & Denise Dickens

P.S. Do you wish to continue receiving our newsletters? *Due to rising postage costs, our future mailing list will include only interested parties.* **If you desire to continue receiving the OBI newsletter, please send us an e-mail - or - detach the lower section and send it to OBI.** (Otherwise, this will most likely be the last OBI newsletter sent to your address.)

Ministry Opportunities – please mark all that apply

- Yes, I would like to continue receiving the OBI newsletter
- I prefer to receive the OBI newsletter at this e-mail address: _____
(or make this request by e-mail at obi@olivebranchinternational.com)
- I commit to pray for the Dickens family
- Gift of _____ enclosed
- I would like to pledge _____ monthly

Sponsorship Program

- I would like to sponsor _____ children at \$20/month
- Send me information on the sponsorship program

Feed the Children – Potter's House, Guatemala

- Gift of _____ enclosed for Potter's House
- Send me information on Potter's House International

Your name: _____

Changes in address/phone number: _____