KEYTOUR # 17

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY ECUADOR CONSTRUCTION TEAM 2008

FEBRUARY 9 THROUGH 18, 2008

A journal by the participants in the Illinois South Conference United Church of Christ Habitat for Humanity Ecuador Construction Delegation Durán (Guayaquil), Guayas, Ecuador
Well the day has finally arrived. February 9, 2008 is the start of a trip we have all been looking forward to making. We will have the opportunity to exercise the true meaning of our Christian faith. In doing so we will bring hope to less fortunate families.

The trip is beginning in the dark, perhaps a sign? My eyes were bleary as I arrived at Lambert at 5:00 a.m. I am sure that each of us was a bit sluggish as we staggered in.

We all managed to arrive and board the plane to Miami. Someone on the plane, not of our team, suffered a medical emergency and we had a few bumpy periods but all and all it was comfortable and flat. Most of us were wearing team shirts to identify our mission. On the back it read:

"GLOBAL CHURCH PARTNERSHIPS: MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE-- BE CHRIST’S HANDS IN THE WORLD."
Everyone seems upbeat despite our early rises. Some of the team even decided to go into Miami. The speculation was that they wanted to try out their Spanish before arriving in Guayaquil.

We were starting to fall asleep waiting in Miami when Cal suggested that we play a dice game. Those of us who joined in had a fun time and it helped move the time along.

In addition to our long wait, our plane was one and one-half hours late. Kent took the opportunity to brief us all on the other five Ecuadorian mission partners of the Illinois South Conference. This gave each of us the opportunity to better answer questions about our mission to Guayaquil.

We all sat together on the four and one-half-hour flight to Guayaquil, which was pleasant. When we arrived we were all quite weary.

My head hit the pillow at 1:15 a.m. I said a prayer thanking the Lord for our safe arrival and the pen fell out of my hand.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2008

I will start my journal day from the time we got up, since 2-10-08 was beginning before our previous day actually ended. We were still traveling and unloading from the airport after midnight on day one.

It’s already been an amazing trip. We (my roommate, June, and I), got up before the human alarm clock, Nancy, called at 7:00 a.m. June & I both woke up at 6:00 a.m. and started to get ready. I took my nice cold shower, (which I was prepared for by the team’s stories of previous shower encounters on other trips). We met everyone in the cafeteria at our Hotel Nueve de Octubre, at 8:00 a.m. I gave the first morning prayer. Not knowing what our first meal would be, I enjoyed my meal. We had scrambled eggs and a delicious roll with a thick piece of cheese (queso) inside and a little butter. We also had a small glass of juice, which I think it was pineapple juice or most people had instant coffee. The coffee consisted of a cup of hot water or cup of hot milk, whichever you preferred. Some used both. Then the powdered coffee was added. I don’t like coffee, so I drank only the juice.

Once we finished eating, the coordinator, Bernardo, from Habitat for Humanity-Guayaquil came and told us to be ready by 9:30 a.m. in the lobby. Church started at 10:00 a.m. We were visiting the church of the Ramirez-Aguilera family, one of the families for whom we were to be building. We all loaded up in one van and headed for the church, except for Mariana, Bill, Dick, and Jena. They ventured down a few blocks from the hotel and attended a Catholic Church.
Well, they missed out on the second meal of the day! I will explain later. Once we got to church the preacher and the music director, and a few others greeted us. Not too many were there at first, so I felt more comfortable being in a smaller crowd. Eventually more people arrived and it was a fairly big crowd. Most of them had been with the kids in class. For such a small church, they had a nice size attendance. Several fans were set up. That felt nice because it was so hot. We were nice and sweaty for church.

Then the Ramirez-Aguilera family arrived, and Bernardo introduced us. The family was so grateful for us being there and helping build their house. They have 4 kids (2 girls and 2 boys). The couple’s names are Maria Del Carmen Aguilera Posligua (Mary) and Eddy Ramirez Valarezo. Their kids’ names were Juliana-15 years old (3rd year of high school), Michele-12 years old (1st year of high school), Andres-7 years old (2nd grade), and Heddy-11 months old. They came around to each of us as we were seated, and hugged and kissed us on the cheek and thanked us. Both Mary and Eddie can speak some English. They were currently living in a house that their sister loaned to them.

The service lasted about 2 hours. We enjoyed lots of music. They used a computer to project the words (in Spanish) on the wall for us to see. There were a couple songs we recognized. One of the songs was "Open the Hands of the Heart." It was nice to recognize the music. The music director played his guitar and sang. Mary and another church lady sang a few songs. It was beautiful music. We also tried to sing along.

During the service I noticed a couple of the girls were carrying in pots. I knew we were about to have another food experience and some of the team was going to miss out. Well, at the end of the service we were asked to stay and join them for some soup they had prepared for us. In the same room as the service, they put up 1 big table and used the white plastic "lawn" chairs from the service. They insisted that we sit and eat. We all slowly found a seat and prepared ourselves for our meal. They served us, then the preacher, the family, and Rachel (the interpreter from the church) sat at the table with us. Everyone watched and waited for us to eat the soup and bread. I believe it was fish onion soup. They also had lime for us to squeeze into our soup. They took pictures of us eating. They had metal cups for us to drink our soda. Finally everyone else in the church started to join us in eating the soup. They would find some extra chairs to sit in or just stand and eat. The soup was interesting. The lime did flavor it very well. It was actually pretty good until we got a nice crunchy bite of who-knows-what. When I noticed the family and members eating, I began taking pictures of them! I did enjoy my half bowl of soup, but found that taking the pictures was much more enjoyable.
The members were of all ages. We were able to visit with several of the members. We could pick out some words they were saying or else Rachel or someone would be near to help. Once again, everyone was hugging and kissing us. They were all very generous. We then loaded on the van along with Rachel and the preacher. They took us by the preacher’s house and the Christian school. They said it is hard to get kids there and to keep them coming back, and that a lot of the men think religion and Christianity is witchcraft. They asked us to pray for them and to help it grow.

We got back to the hotel and met up with the rest of the team. We all gathered in the cafeteria for another lunch. We had noodles, (it looked and tasted like chow mein at a Chinese restaurant), also potato soup and rice. It was very good, but I couldn’t eat too much, since I ate soup earlier. To drink we had more fruit juice. While we ate we were able to see a soccer game on the television. The lunch crowd in the cafeteria cheered for the Ecuador team, which won. After we ate, we had a couple hours to rest and do a little unpacking and organizing.

We then met in the lobby and headed downtown to the Malecón. On the way, we stopped at the Iguana Park. It was a small park full of Iguanas. They were on the grass, on the walkway, and they covered the trees. I’ve never seen anything like it before. It was beautiful.

Also beside the park was the Catholic Church that the others attended earlier. It was nice to see the church they were at. It was also a beautiful church. We walked along the river walk and took pictures and headed for the lighthouse. That was a several-mile walk. Then we had 500 steps up the hill to the bottom of the lighthouse, followed by 52 steps to the top. Along the journey up the stairs, there were shops and homes with many people around. We stopped in some of the shops to rest and cool off and, of course, shop. It was probably 95 degrees, if not hotter, with a bright sun. I decided to stop around step 250 or was it less? That was plenty of exercise for me. The lighthouse looked nice from a distance. Some of us then headed back to the park, to wait and meet up with everyone else.

Mary, the preacher, and Rachel made it to the top with some of the others. Mary’s husband Eddy met up with us later in the park. We all then headed home to the hotel, making a stop to make phone calls. There were several phone cafés and cyber cafés. We could call home for 10 to 25 cents a minute. It was nice to be able to do that. We then met two friends from the last few mission trips, Christian and Eric. We all went next door and ate at Gus’s. That included Natalia, our Habitat interpreter for a few days. It was now around 7:00 p.m. We had chicken and rice and miniature potatoes. They gave us plastic gloves to eat the chicken with our hands, since it was so greasy. The chicken was really not working for my stomach and me. I just passed my share to whoever wanted it. The rice and potatoes were very good. We also had soda there. We always had plenty of soda so far.
While we were finishing, several little boys would come in and ask for leftovers. They would wait around hoping someone would give them something. Most of us finally just left, by the request of Natalie. We were then able again to make calls or just head back to our room for sleep. We knew we all had a big first workday ahead.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2008

Donna Thomas
138 El Cerito Drive
Belleville IL  62221
618-234-9236
djthomas1021@charter.net

We were all tired after a short night of sleep. After a breakfast in the hotel, we went back to our room to gather our belongings and get ready to start our mission.

We began Monday morning by walking several blocks to the Habitat Office, carrying our backpacks, along with our tools and building supplies. Upon arrival at the office, we were seated and ready for the safety briefing. The briefing was a power point presentation; however, it was in Spanish, so Mariana translated it into English.

We visited the Ramirez-Aguilera Family (Eddy Ramirez Valarezo and Maria Del Carmen Aguilera Podigua) for a brief time and were introduced to the whole family. This family is currently living in Maria’s sister’s home, while she is out of town. Her sister’s family will be returning to their home sometime in late March, at which time Eddy and Maria and their family will need to move out.

Upon arrival at the worksite we were divided into two work-teams, (one team made up of Kent, Becky, Beth, Bill, Jena, June and Donna: and the other team made up of Jim, Cal, Dave, Dick, Mariana, Nancy and Scott), to work on two different houses. The houses were several blocks away from each other. The houses were also in different stages of construction. The house we (Kent’s team) worked on was a few days ahead of the other house. Our house was ready to begin wall construction. This process began by mixing the sand and cement together, then adding water to make the mortar. This mortar was used to secure the blocks into the walls. We also moved & stacked the blocks closer to where the walls were going to be built.

We seemed to attract lots of attention from the locals. There was one man in particular whom we later named “Panama Jack.” At first we weren’t sure what to think of him; not sure if we should be concerned for our safety. Later we decided he was some kind of a neighborhood watch person.
The maestro laid the first row of blocks and we finished the walls, keeping them straight with the plum line strings. They were used to help us keep the walls both plumb from front to back and level across the top. This is considerably different from last year when the maestro put in all the blocks himself and we simply filled in the mortar in between the blocks.

Beth is a very special lady; smart and multi-talented. One minute she’s building a wall and the next minute she is running to the aid of a little girl, who was choking. During this wall building, there was a commotion and someone said there was a little girl choking. (Later we found out the little girl was 3 years old.) Beth ran over to help. Christian went over with her to explain to the mom that Beth was a nurse. Beth said the little girl was not able to get air. After Beth repeated the Heimlich maneuver several times, the little girl was getting some air, but she needed to go to the hospital to see a doctor because there was still something wrong with her. Later that day, the little girl and her family returned and she was fine. The next several times the little girl saw Beth, she would start crying. Beth thought the little girl was probably afraid of her.

This year, the natural elements were considerably harder to deal with than last year at Santo Domingo. The temperatures were much hotter with higher humidity. Also there was lack of shade except under the tin roof being put on the house. Like last year, we didn’t mind getting rained on as long as it wasn’t a downpour.

The working conditions were also considerably different. This year we could get water from a hose rather than from the river. Additionally, we had electrical power. To get the electricity, they simply hook 2 wires over the bare city power lines, which enabled them to get boot-legged power. At quitting time, they would remove the wires.

Last year the bathroom was extremely primitive, however, you could use it anytime you needed to. It was a toilet that was a cross between an outhouse and a bathroom. This year we used the neighbor’s bathroom, which was in their house. The neighbor was very gracious, but we felt like we were intruding. We were so hot and most of the time our shoes were extremely muddy. We removed our shoes before going into their house. Their house was also very hot and the bathroom was very small.

Site conditions: last year we were in a rural setting; large lot with trees, bushes and close to a river. The neighbor had chickens roaming in their yard. This year the houses were in a subdivision; the house was actually attached to the house next door and the house behind. The lots were very tiny. The streets are patrolled with lots of police. The police carried billy clubs and something like machine guns. They wore something that looked like bulletproof vests. The people were friendly, even with the language barrier. At the entrance to the subdivision were huge dumpsters, which must have been for the whole subdivision.
Like last year, lunch was delivered to the worksite. Everyday we had soup, rice and some kind of surprise meat. We also had some sort of fruit for a snack. There was always water available, not cold, but it was wet. After the first day, we brought soda and Gatorade to the work site to try and quench our thirst. Last year the food tasted better, so it is hard to compare.

Although the first workday started late, because of the temperatures and humidity, we were glad when it was time to go back to the hotel.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2008

Today began at 6:00 a.m. with Nancy’s wake up call so we could be at breakfast by 7:00 a.m. Breakfast at the hotel consisted of juice, instant coffee, eggs and bread with cheese. After breakfast we walked to the Habitat office a few blocks from the hotel.

At the Habitat office we met Luis, Bernardo, Natalia and the architect, Juan. They gave us a brief orientation about Habitat for Humanity in Ecuador. Juan gave us an overview about the construction process and safety. He was really impressed with all the tools Dave had.

After the orientation, we went to the home of Eddy and Maria del Carmen, the Habitat homeowners. They have four children; Juliana, 15 years old; Michelle, 12 years old; Andre, 7 years old and Heddie, 1 year old. They are living in the home of Maria del Carmen’s sister. However, they must soon leave her home because she is returning home from the USA.

Finally, around 11:30 a.m. we arrived at the site Mucho Lote and were divided into 2 teams. I went to the site of Maria del Carmen and Eddie’s future home. From the first site we walked about a quarter mile to the second site. That day the guys—Dave, Dick, Cal, Scott and Jim got the ground ready and partly leveled. They were assisted by the local construction men—Antonio, Luis, Stalin, Carlos and Maestro Antonio, all of whom were very nice and friendly. I helped Nancy paint some metal bars that were used below the ceiling.

We ate lunch around 12:30p.m. Most of us ate lunch under the shade because it was very hot and humid. We were not very hungry, but we were very thirsty. We continue work till 4:30p.m.

We left for the hotel shortly after 4:30p.m. When we got to the hotel, we took a shower and relaxed until dinnertime. Then around 7:30p.m. we went to dinner with Natalia, the Habitat Ecuador’s Global Village Coordinator. We walked a few blocks to a Spanish Restaurant near
the Iguana Park. The restaurant was very good. We were there a few hours. We all enjoyed the food and the fellowship. After dinner we walked back to the hotel around 10:00p.m.

I had to admit I had a great first workday. Guayaquil is very hot and humid but I am glad we are all here.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2008

Tuesday started out with rain, as usual, but while the worksite was wet, the drops coming from the sky stopped by the time we arrived.

Breakfast was the usual, and I am still surprised that instant coffee is served in a land where coffee is grown. During our devotion we looked at Genesis 12 where God called Abraham to go to a land, which was unknown to him, and he went with faith. Though most of us in the team had been to Ecuador previously (10 of the 14), this is a land and culture and climate and experience unknown to us, but we are here because of our faith.

We all got dropped off at one location and half of us walk to our other site, about 6-8 blocks away, often referred to as the “second“ house. We have friendly banter between us about which team is better, harder working, harsher work conditions, etc. The “first“ house has a roof already, so “they” get to work in shade, while “we” are exposed to the sun with nowhere to hide. But no one really complains and means it.

The truck with blocks arrives and we groan, anticipating the unloading. But it goes quicker than we thought since we could stack them right next to where the truck was parked. When we later moved the blocks from the stacks to the walls, Antonio would hold 5 blocks on his left hand (like a waiter in a restaurant) and balance the top with his right hand. Most of us could hold two blocks in each hand (holding by the holes). At one point, I picked up three in each hand, long enough for a photo op. Antonio saw me and we smiled at each other. Then on his next trip, as we passed each other, Antonio removed his right hand from the top of the blocks and smiled as he walked past me balancing the five blocks only on his right hand.

I found out that Antonio is 18 years old and has a child named Calvin. His wife and child visited the site on our last day, and I got a picture of myself with his Calvin. (If one ever wants a guaranteed picture, just hold a baby!)
Jena joined “our” team today. She is the only one who switched between sites. She made her mark by breaking one of the shovels! Scott whittled down the end of the handle and was able to successfully reattach it, making it usable, though several inches shorter than normal. We quickly dubbed it the “Mariana shovel,” inscribed it as such and presented it to the shortest member of our entourage.

Some of the neighborhood children visited us during our lunch break, and we gave them balloons and pipe cleaners. They were not sure what to do with the pipe cleaners until I used one of them to hold the hair back on a little girl. One of the older boys realized it could be used to pop his brother’s balloon! We taught them how to make a balloon squeak, by blowing it up and stretching the neck to make it vibrate.

I recall Tuesday as perhaps the hottest day of the week, although others may disagree. We worked moving dirt, mixing cement, schlepping the blocks, starting the walls, draining some puddles -- the usual. The roofer started to weld some of the “C” channel beams together, which were put in place over the rest of the week. He got power for his welder by hooking wire to the overhead power lines, using a 20-foot stick. (Of course, a contribution will be sent to the power company for the electric used!) We found out that Eddie, the husband/father of the family we are building for, sleeps at the site every night to guard the materials from “walking off.”

While driving back to the October 9th Hotel, I looked around the inside of our van. Fourteen of us, the driver, the architect, Bernardo, all our tools and backpacks… 17 in a space designed for 14. We were sweaty and tired, and looked it. I imagined what most of us would think if we saw a similar team of foreigners crowded in a van in any of our cities. Probably not in complementary terms.

Pizza Hut for dinner reminded us of fast food back home, and ice cream at KFC completed the evening.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2008

Beth Rosenthal
1025 Ruskin Avenue
Edwardsville, IL  62025
618-659-9988
rosey916@prodigy.net

It was a rainy start to the day again but, like yesterday, the rain had stopped by the time we got to the worksite. We were fortunate that there wasn’t sun until 11:00 a.m., because then it got hot and humid. It is a different experience this year than last. We worked on two houses
this year so we didn’t get to all work together. I got the house that had the roof to start with and that was a blessing during the hot times and during the rainy times.

The homeowner and her son worked with us today. They are hard workers. They also brought us some Coke Zero. Now those of you who know me, know I was grateful!

We worked on more walls today. We worked together as pairs. Everyone is working well together and we each were learning from each other. *Maestro* finished setting the pipes for the bathroom and then we filled the floor with dirt. Kent was the tamping king.

There were a lot of locals today. Children were playing and were thrilled to get a Polaroid picture and some toys.

Many were asking questions about how they could get a Habitat house. There seems to be a lot of building going on in the neighborhood.

While we waited to leave for the day, there was a local soccer game going on with the kids. Christian and Jena played with them and had a good time. Each day as we left and took the van ride home we got to hear how each house was coming along. It is only the beginning. I can’t wait to see how our houses will look by the end of the week.

I never thought I would be glad to have a cold shower, but I was. When I was hot, that cold shower really made me appreciate my shower at home all the more.

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2008**

Scott Saeger
632 South Missouri Avenue
Belleville, IL  62220
618-355-9307
Scott 2614@juno.com

This morning at breakfast Cal distributed blank slips of paper. The devotional for today was to write blessings for the homeowners on small papers. They are to be placed inside the concrete masonry blocks as we build the walls during the day. The team members at our site had their pictures taken by Cal as the block with their blessing was placed in the wall. The act of placing my blessing in the wall makes me feel like I have a strong permanent connection with the house and family.

We had communion at the other house site with the Ecuadorian workers and homeowners. This was the first time I had communion outdoors.
The team seemed to be happy with my method of keeping the concrete blocks level and plumb as they were being installed. This positive feedback made me feel like I contributed to the team today.

The soup we had for lunch was very good. It tasted like split pea. The local children visited us during lunch. Cal gave out pipe cleaners to all the children. He used the pipe cleaners to make ponytails on the girls that had long hair. Dave gave out colorful balloons. I showed them some hand tricks my grandpa had taught me including pulling the thumb apart and interlocking hands while rocking the middle fingers. One boy came back to me for a more in-depth lesson on pulling his thumb apart. It felt good that he was comfortable enough with me to be close and ask, without speaking, for more instruction. The kids were excited to have their photos taken by us.

The south site had a portable concrete mixer that they used to mix the concrete that was poured in place for the floor. After the floor was poured, the team from the south site joined the north-site team for the afternoon and built exterior concrete masonry walls.

It rained hard several times today as we were working and everyone was wet and muddy by the end of the day. The clouds and rain did create a much cooler atmosphere than yesterday. The relative coolness felt very nice.

On the way back to the hotel, Christian explained that the local people do not drink the tap water. The water would also make them sick just as we were warned not to drink the tap water. I was under the impression that it was safe for the native people to drink the water.

At supper tonight we met a high school student that the Illinois South Conference sponsors. The student’s local mentor also ate with us. She is a legal prosecutor that has visited the United States.

Tonight I purchased bottled water to brush my teeth and drink in the room. I noticed on the receipt that the sales tax is 12%. That is much higher than we are used to. Part of our team stopped at Kentucky Fried Chicken after dinner for ice cream. It was a good end to the long day.
Today is another glorious day. Before breakfast Bill showed us where there was a nearby bakery shop. We were so thrilled, because the quality of our breakfasts improved dramatically. In this small matter, we would become the master of our own little destiny. Who would have thought that such a thing would make us so very happy?

Today the floor was poured in our house. What a hard day. Thank God it was over-cast with rain. The cement mixer was set at the back of the house, near the sand pile. The rocks were in the vacant lot beside the house. The cement bags were stored in a building a couple blocks away.

We were working at a fast and furious pace. It was hard keeping up with shoveling the rocks, filling the wood boxes, carrying them across the broken boards, through the mud water to the cement mixer. Once the sand, rocks, cement mix and water were all being tumbled around and mixed, the mixture was poured into two wheelbarrows. Neither of them was in great shape. One of them didn’t have a tire on the front wheel, just a metal rim. I guess in the end it didn’t matter because the floor did get poured. Our equipment made no difference in the outcome; it only mattered to us.

The maestro had to work fast because his father had died and he was going to his funeral. I wonder how he was able to work. I remember when each of my parents died; I took off work for a few days. There was no way I would have been able to work. I suppose different people process grief in different ways.

The other team came up to our house where Cal hosted Holy Communion. It was very nice to have our whole team together, along with all the Ecuadorians, receiving communion. It was nice; last year when we had communion, we were out in the rough (rural surroundings). After communion and prior to lunch being delivered, the other team went back to their house.

After lunch was delivered and eaten, our team went to the other house to lend a hand. We were part of the concrete bucket brigade filling the piers of the house. We also carried block. What’s that old saying, “Been there, done that”; same job, different location.
It's Thursday, the 14th of February--St. Valentine's Day. I had prayer today and started by reminding everyone that no one loves each of us more than Jesus Christ.

What a great bunch of people! Most of us are weary from the heat, humidity, rain and strain of the work but each of us rises early, ready to embark on a wonderful inner experience.

As usual, after a very tightly packed ride to the sites, we arrive at Site #2 where work will be mostly undercover. "El grupo magnifico" then trudges off to Site #1 to begin our work in a sea of mud. What fun! We all bear with it and do whatever we can to move the work along. The first task today seems to be a bucket brigade to take the accumulated water out of our site.

We had a pineapple break this morning. It was juicy and delicious. La familia de la casa arrived shortly thereafter. Eight small children arrived at 11:30 a.m. They sang a song for us. Really cute! They were the same ones who came yesterday and they were looking for more gifts, which were supplied to them by some of our team.

The beams are up with the roof soon to follow! The heat is returning with a vengeance.

We made good progress today and might be ready to pour the floor sometime tomorrow, if not, probably Saturday. Everyone seemed bone weary going back to the hotel in the van. Dinner is early tonight because of festivities at a church this evening.

Site #2 was well in advance of Site #1 and may be close to finished before we leave. Even if Site #1 is not at that stage, we will all be proud of what we contributed toward its eventual completion. All of us worked hard (some more than others) and while quite tired we were all glad we came.

In the evening, after dinner we went to the church of the Ramirez-Aguilera family. The occasion was a St. Valentine’s Day celebration. The family and their fellow church members were warm and upbeat and made us feel very welcome. One of our team was so overcome by the Holy Spirit during one of the sermons that she/he (not to be named) fell off their chair and almost knocked over several tables. The oldest daughter in the family, Juliana, age 15, translated some of the sermons from Spanish to English for us.
"This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it" Psalm 118:24

This will be a good scripture to remember later in the day as the heat and humidity climb to seasonal highs. It is the rainy season and the humidity seems to be the problem for the most of us. It's Valentine's Day so we are reminded of a song "Love Is All You Need".

We are awakened each morning by the ringing of the phone because our friend Nancy loves us. Gus and Sue sent each of us a valentine and candy. Thanks guys, the only thing nicer would be having you here with us........By the way, Dave got one that sings.

The large dining room with its big windows is great after having none in our room. I like looking down on the city streets at all the people coming and going. I think they are probably buying valentines. Dick reminds us of God's love in our mealtime prayer. How about that Cal! He loved us all so much he has had the devotion himself every day. It's always something to think about. He reminds us that we are a team, and that we each bring something.

On the van at 8:00 a.m. or so—just when we think we're packed and ready to travel, Kent arrives. Pull him in and slam the door....Ecuadorians have no concept of "capacity or seat belts." God love the sardines! The ride to the building site is great because we see so much of the everyday lives of the people. The old man with the cane, the people setting up the stands to sell whatever, the seemingly hundreds of bus drivers, the poor souls just trying to get across the streets, the crowds of people waiting on the hundreds of buses to go somewhere, and the children going through the daily trash. God love the people!

Our first job of the day upon arriving at the worksite is to move blocks from point A to point B, and then maybe C. As more walls go up, it begins to look more like a house. The homeowner's eyes are filled with love as she points out which room will belong to whom. God love her. The Maestro's family comes by and he introduces them. We are reminded that they have just lost a loved one. Once more we realize our lives are not that different. Lunch arrives. No surprises, soup and rice and I think maybe onions and beets.
After lunch, word has spread about the pictures taken with the Polaroid camera. Kids, young men, women with babies and policemen come by for a picture. Bill keeps giving away his endless supply of beanie babies, and I'm sure at the other building site, Dave is still finding kids for his balloons.

We get back to work on the walls. The work is frustrating as it is difficult to keep the walls plumb. I won't give up my day job, that's for sure. We go down to the other work site and see that much has been done in just a couple days. The other part of our team has risen to the challenge and has the house almost ready for the floors to be poured. God love the hot days of hard work they have had.

On the way back to wait for the van to pick us up, it begins to rain. We take shelter in one of the empty houses along the way. We have been invited to a Valentine party at the Family Life Center Church, so after a long hot day of work, we go because the people want to show us their (what else) love. It is a little different from parties as we know them, lots of great music (and the beat goes on, and on, and on) snacks and fellowship. Just feel the luv! Then it's back through the rain into our van and back to our “home away from home.” Is there anything I don't love about these trips? Maybe the iguanas!

God Bless each!

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2008

Today started with breakfast as usual at 7:00 a.m.. Most of us showed up a little late. We left a little after 8:00 a.m. to go to the site. At my site, we had Cal, Dave, Dick, Scott, Jim, Nancy and myself. That day we were assisted by Antonio, Stalin, and Luis--the “Gato Flaco” (Skinny Cat). He was called that because he was so skinny that his pants were very loose.
That day the columns and roof were finished. However, we had to scoop water from the floor due to heavy rain the night before. It was very easy work but very tedious. Some of the guys worked on putting in the water pipes and electric conduit. Cal was very resourceful; he had some plastic ties that were used to put the pipes together. However, they were also used to tie Antonio’s hands. That was pretty funny. Dave had to use his army knife to untie Antonio.

Lunch arrived at 12:30 p.m. It consisted of soup, rice and fried fish. Some of us were not hungry, so we gave our food to the guys. They eat the food as if they had not eaten for days. It was very cool to be able to share in their joy.

After lunch Kent came from the other site to supervise us. I think he just wanted to be with us. We were very happy to see him, because he helped us unload the blocks from the truck. Unloading the blocks from the truck was not bad. There were not too many blocks.

Jim and Scott laid the blocks for one of the walls while some of us worked on getting the mix ready for the mortar. It was amazing seeing Cal carry the bags of cement (110 pounds). He is a very strong man. It was really fun. We all worked together and laughed together. I loved working with Nancy since she was the only other female on the site. She had a great attitude; she never complained and was very patient with me. Dick and Dave were also very patient with me. They made a few remarks about me. For instance, I told him earlier that he was red (I meant that his face was red). He replied “I am not a Communist”.

Before we left for the day, we made sure everything was ready to pour the floor the next day. We were not very concerned about the tools since we learned earlier in the week that the homeowner, Eddie, slept at the site every night under a tent to make sure no one stole the tools or materials. I could not believe the sacrifice Eddie was making so his family could have a home.

We got back to the hotel around 5:00 p.m. We did not do much that evening since we were all tired and knew we had to work extra hard the next day since it would be our last.
Some of us went to church this morning at Centro Cristiano de Guayaquil. It’s huge! We were told that their attendance is around 3,000! There were large screens positioned so that everyone could easily see the pastor and the musicians. A kind lady, sitting near Beth and June, interpreted the sermon for them when she realized that they didn’t understand Spanish. The people of Ecuador are very warm and welcoming.

After church, as we were driving, we noticed a Pizza Hut and decided to stop and have lunch there. We were craving some junk food.

Our team had decided earlier in the week to separate today. One team went to the beach. I wanted to go with the team going to the historical park. I don’t remember what it’s called. The park was in a beautiful, lush, garden setting.

The park had three distinct areas. The first was a zoo containing animals indigenous to the area. The animals we saw included tapirs, sloths, wild pigs, ocelots, parrots, iguanas and turtles. The second area of the park portrayed life in Guayaquil during a prosperous time when coffee growers brought wealth to the region. We were able to tour three beautiful, reconstructed, historical buildings in this section. The final area showed what life was like in the surrounding countryside. We were able to see an hacienda, and we also saw how campesinos lived. We were entertained with singing, dancing and a skit. It was an enjoyable way to spend the afternoon.

Earlier in the week, we had the opportunity to have dinner with a girl who is attending school on a scholarship provided by our Illinois South Conference. What a neat experience. Our student was accompanied by her mentor, an attorney in Guayaquil. The lawyer,
Antonieta Piedrahita, is a warm, friendly woman who insisted on hosting a coffee that evening for us.

So, after dinner, a team of us walked with Antonieta to her sister’s apartment where we had coffee and finger foods. We met her sisters and her nephew. They took us to the roof of the apartment building to see a beautiful view of Guayaquil at night. Our hostess was so gracious, and she even gave little souvenirs of the area to each of us. It was a lovely way to end our stay in Ecuador.

Jena Krueger
7631 State Road 163
Belleville, IL 62223
618-719-9959
kruegerstables@yahoo.com

Bill Whicher
1015 Monroe
Belleville, IL 62220
618-
Billllll36@yahoo.com

David Woelfel
544 Buena Vista
Edwardsville, IL 62025
618-656-5850
dhwoelfel@hotmail.com

Delegation organizers
Sue and Gus Kuether
536 Pebble Brook Lane
Belleville, IL 62221
618-628-0646
ghkuether@charter.net