

Buenos Aires 2004



An Ambassador's Welcome

After an all night flight we arrived in Buenos Aires bleary-eyed, exhausted, and feeling grimy. We were some of the last people off the plane and were stuck at the end of a long line at immigration when a kind-faced, smiling guy came up to us and said, "Tim and Annette?" After we indicated that, to the best of our recollection, that was us, he ushered us past the line to pick up our luggage and then into the VIP waiting room where we lounged on leather couches and sipped Earl Grey tea while we waited for the customs line to disappear.

Our rescuer, Matias, loves the Muniello family (our hosts) because he came to know Christ personally through them (and because he is quite fond of their youngest daughter Jessica ☺.) We may never experience the VIP treatment again, but not only was it fun, it felt weighty somehow, like a reminder that we were there as God's ambassadors and even though the world doesn't perceive or value His kingdom, He is involved in all of the details and nothing is more important to Him.

Catalytic Connectors

All of the details of the trip had the sense of God's perfect plan and timing, but since we've been back it has been hard to explain to people what went on. I think in part it's hard because what happened is a the fruit of a long process that takes a bit of background and in part because so much stuff happened it's hard to know what to tell about. So I'll start with some background...if that bores you feel free to skip ahead.

Connecting – We both come from families of connectors, people with a broad network of relationships who frequently are able to facilitate the connection between one person's need or dream and another person's resources. (I have even seen lots of occasions where my parents have met needs that people didn't even know they had. ☺)

Being connected to people and connecting people has been a hallmark of our lives too, especially over the past almost 9 years we've been in Mexico: we send personal news to over 400 people a month; about 90,000 people a month visit

ParaLideres.org our "web team" that provides support and some content for the site consists of 5 people in 3 countries; our "Raíces" youth leader training team contains people from 4 different countries; etc, etc., you get the point.

As our network of relationships has grown over the years, we have made a conscious decision to strengthen some of the most meaningful and strategic of those relationships by investing in "agendas" that are outside the sphere of our "agenda." This has ranged from having our animator create a presentation for a fellow youth leader trainer's workshop to having our assistant type out a colleague's 12 volume bible study series so they can be published online to helping friend's home-schooled children have a good overseas educational experience.



This is our way of taking seriously the fact that we are all part of body meant to work together and complement each other. Where this gets tricky is when that investment becomes costly and for us three weeks away from home, not to mention plane tickets to Argentina, is costly ☺.

Of all our colleagues, Gerardo Muniello, one of the writers and speakers at the Raíces training and senior pastor at San Andres in Olivos church in Buenos Aires, is one of the people we most value. He fuses a pastor's love and compassion for God and people with a strategic mind developed through years of being a business consultant specialized in leadership. To top it off he loves and is committed to youth and "tithes" two weeks a year of his time to training youth leaders.

Three years ago he (and his family) took the major step of accepting the call to pastor a small Presbyterian congregation founded by Scottish immigrants who also founded a grammar school, which is now the premier K-12 school in the country and in 1988 opened a university. In an attempt to not bore you with MORE details, I'll just say that Gerardo is not only leading that church into multi-faced growth but is also involved in helping it recover it's role as a spiritual and moral compass for the school, which produces people who become leaders in their fields, both nationally and internationally.

Now back to us... the past two years we have stayed with Gerardo and Adriana when we were in Buenos Aires for the Youth Specialties conference. As we heard their vision, visited their church and the schools, we were impressed and decided we would do whatever we could to support them.

Little did we know that they would be supporting us first as members of their church housed, fed and doted on 28 Mexicans from our church for two weeks so they could experience the church's youth



program and its outreach retreat called "Eje". The kids came back deeply impacted, not only by the Eje program but also by the love and dedication of their new friends.

As the last group of kids came out of the gangplank in the Mexico City airport, we were waiting to board the same plane on our way down to Buenos Aires, so we got to see their joy-ful faces and hear snippets of what had happened. So we were again impressed by the church and full of gratitude for their help with our "agenda" in Mexico when we arrived for our three-week stay.

Our time was organized around two sets of visitors who were coming to get to know Gerardo and San Andres Olivos at our invitation: Daryl Heald (from Lookout Mt. Presbyterian Church and Generous Giving) with his two daughters and Vernon Rainwater (from Northland, a Church Distributed in Orlando, FL.)

It would take pages more to talk about all of the great connecting and possible future projects that came out of those visits, but here are a few highlights.

- Without a doubt it was a highlight for us just to be able to spend time with the Daryl, Francis, Hallie and Vernon. (At one point Tim realized that he probably hadn't spent that much concentrated time with Vernon since the late '80s when they did youth camps together.) And time with them was even more fun because we were in one of our favorite cities and we got to introduce them to some of our favorite people.
- We're eager to hear what happens as a result of Daryl's teaching on generosity. (If you're not familiar with his ministry check out www.Generousgiving.org. It has lots of great articles and resources!) We see generosity as a missing component in the church in Latin America and are excited about what can happen if people can break out of a "zero-sum" mentality and open themselves up to be conduits of God's fullness and become "rich in every way." (2 Cor. 9:11)



- Vernon gave a private seminar for the two elders in charge of worship and invited Gerardo and a group of elders to visit Northland next year. Since “praise and worship” is one of the strongest movements in the Latin American church, Gerardo is eager to offer an experience that lives up to the name “worship”, where the focus is God and not a the dynamic personality of someone on stage or a frenzied emotional experience.



- Douglas, the elder in charge of Christian education, practically danced a jig he was so excited to see all of the teaching resources that Richard Pratt and his ministry Third Millennium (www.thirdmill.org) sent down with Vernon. I know that Douglas will make the most of these materials as he provides biblical teaching especially for the laypeople who are in leadership and for the growing number of new members who come from a broad range of denominational backgrounds.

Catalyst—There were all kinds of things that happened as a result of the right people being in the right place at the right time. The other day we heard the following quote: “When I pray, coincidences happen. When I don’t, they don’t.” Well, in three weeks we saw two years of our prayers worth of coincidences happen. And amazingly before we even got this letter posted, two more leaders from Northland were already in Argentina for a whirlwind follow-up visit.

- We were standing at a soccer game talking with Vernon and a church member, Paul Margenet, who is also in charge of fundraising for the university. Paul mentioned that the university is planning on sending him to the US to visit some schools with healthy endowment funds; Vernon said that he has a friend who could help him plan his trip so he could visit schools with a high academic level and a Christian worldview; they set up a conference call for the next week; and that was that. All the while Paul’s wife was having the best anniversary night of her life because she was at *her* team’s stadium watching them win. (The San Lorenzo Saints, by the way.)

- The Heald girls, Frances and Hallie, wanted to help out in a concrete way so while their dad was in meetings Terence, one of the lay leaders from church, took the three of us out to “Quinta San Andres”, a group foster home sponsored by the church. The Peruvian couple who parent eight foster kids and two of their own had worked with Compassion International in Peru, so we hit it off quickly as Tim and I had just been with Compassion in Peru last month. I think were an encouragement to them, I let them know about the studies they could use from our web site to help the kids with their personal bible study and on another visit Tim helped them with...their computer problems.



- While I was at the home, Tim was at a formal lunch with Daryl, Gerardo and the president and rector of the university where Daryl talked with them about fundraising. Afterwards they said they learned more about fundraising in that lunch than in entire seminars they had paid to attend! And during lunch Tim hit it off with the university’s rector who loves Mexico. The day before we left, the two of us enjoyed a nice lunch with him, which we hope adds a positive human aspect to his thinking about the church and its involvement with the university.
- For years we knew that if someone from Lookout Mtn. visited Buenos Aires we wanted them to stay with one particular family, but when Daryl and the girls came down that family was remodeling their home so it wasn’t a good time. Up till the day before the Healds arrived Gerardo was unsure where to have them stay and ended up going with the Pasquet family. This was an unlikely choice for several reasons: they lived a good hour away, didn’t speak English as perfectly as many other

people in the church, had kids older than Hallie and Francis and the mom and youngest son were out of town. But the “chemistry” worked. Everyone had a great time and as Gerardo said, “I think they discovered they have the gift of hospitality.” We probably never would have gotten to know the Pasquets otherwise but really clicked with them and ended up getting together with them several times even after the Healds left.



A Home Run

The first Sunday we were at St. Andrew’s in Olivos church was the day the school celebrated its “Founders Day.” The school’s band and choir participated in the service, which was perfectly crafted, but the highlight of the service was Gerardo’s sermon on “The Characteristics of an Andrew.” As he preached I felt like I was in a baseball stadium: the batter swings...crack.. it looks like a good hit... it keeps going...it’s going far... it’s out of the field... IT’S A HOME RUN. It really was that exciting! Each point hit home the relevance of the biblical witness for the St. Andrews community.

And we weren’t the only ones who thought it was good. The next day the headmaster called Gerardo and asked him to give a summary of the sermon in both the jr. and sr. high school assembly as part of the founder’s day celebration.



The Manual Evolves

On this trip I found out why, as editor of the textbook for youth ministry, I have the most trouble with the chapters that Gerardo wrote: his creative outlet is writing aphorisms, or proverbs. He presents a skeleton (outline) and expects people to flesh out the idea on their own. In our process of creating the animated training course, I am that “people.” Gerardo and Adriana invited us to visit the beach with them, which gave us eight uninterrupted hours in the car with them, a veritable miracle. Tim was ready with a mini-microphone and means to record him so we pumped Gerardo with questions for most of the trip. The work is still in process but I have a

much fuller understanding of the original text and we are making good progress towards fleshing out the rest of his section on the practical application of the biblical principles of youth ministry. (PS: The beach was windy and very cold so we headed home the next day, but we know that in the divine economy the time together was the important thing.)

Memorable Meals

I’d say an average of every other day we had a meal that was extraordinary...noteworthy for both the food and the company. As Gerardo says, “the rest of the world eats to live, we live to eat.” I almost hate to write the highlights because I’ll leave out something that was very worthy, but here are a few snapshots.

We dined at a fabulous restaurant in Puerto Madero called “Las Lilas” with Richard and Phoebe Miles who just arrived in BA 6 weeks ago with the U.S. embassy. We connected with them one Sunday morning at San



Andres Olivos church and enjoyed them so much that we made sure we got together. They are the same ages as us and we had one of those rare easy, rich times together when you feel like old friends because we have so much in common. The food was superlative, and the service as well.

Terence Roberts (aka "Tito"), who had so kindly looked after Frances, Hallie and I, invited Tim and I for lunch in the financial district of downtown Buenos Aires. We ate on the 18th floor of his office building, which has a view of the city, the ecological park and the Plata River. I can't believe we didn't take any pictures but the ones in our mind won't be soon forgotten. The conversation and the food were as great as the view.

Perfect Moments

Since Buenos Aires is on a river a lot of the leisure activities are water related. Some friends of Gerardo's took the Healds and us down the Rio Plata in a sailboat and for lunch at the historic "Yacht Club of Argentina." It was a treat to see Buenos Aires from the river, but also to have some down time with Daryl and the girls, as well as to get to know the three sailors, one of whom was definitely the captain.



The next day we were on the river again but this time in motorboats going up the river into the "Delta" (think Louisiana Bayous or Low Country South Carolina) where we had lunch at a club hidden away on one of a million islands. Sept. is very early spring in Argentina but in the Delta the trees were chartreuse with their new leaves, the azaleas were in bloom and the rivers were so smooth Tim didn't even get seasick.

I had enjoyed the group foster home so much that I wanted Tim to be able to meet everyone so Terence again chauffeured us there. We had a great lunch topped of with the best chocolate mouse I've ever had, creation of Toti, a girl who incidentally is the chef at the club we visited in the Delta where she lives. However she comes the church's Tuesday night prayer meeting and then sleeps at the foster home because she has found a family and refuge there after she was recently abandoned by her husband.

After lunch, while Tim slaved away trying to fix the home's computer, I lounged on the grass in the sun, drinking mate (a sort of herbal tea popular in the southern cone) with Toti, Melisa, the daughter of the foster parents, and her boyfriend. We had bought the "Chronicles of Narnia" series for the kids and Melisa was thrilled because she loves them so much that she had actually started translating them for the kids because she only had them in English. (That afternoon Terence, pleased to know that he could find C.S. Lewis in Spanish, went to the bookstore we recommended and bought all he could find for Melisa, a philosophy major.) When Tim came outside the afternoon was complete: sun, tea, and talking about Lewis with friends. ☺



Gerardo Muniello, Annette & Tim