

Newcomers leave dairy herd to help others

By SALLY BAIR
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MOUNT JOY — "We have so much here that we wanted to do a little more. It is easy to donate money, but you are not giving of yourself." These are the words of Sheryl Newcomer, Mount Joy R3, explaining why she and her husband Preston chose to go to the Dominican Republic for ten days earlier in the month to work with a medical relief mission.

For the Newcomers it meant making arrangements for the care of their 85-head milking cow herd, a leave from Sheryl's teaching position at the Manheim Township Schools and someone to care for their 22-month-old son Timothy. When they first considered going, these arrangements seemed impossible to make, but the pieces fell together and both Sheryl and Preston are enthusiastic about the opportunity it afforded them.

The small island of the Dominican Republic which is about the size of Vermont and New Hampshire is located in the Caribbean Sea. It sounds like a perfect place to spend ten days in mid-winter, but the Newcomers were not there for vacation. What they encountered was the "unbelievable" destruction caused by Hurricane David when it swept through the island last August. Preston said, "Destruction was widespread on the island. Banana and coconut trees were broken off and it will be a matter of years before they can bear again. The people depend on these crops."

Actually, 90 per cent of the agriculture on the island was destroyed in the wake of the hurricane. Winds of up to 130 miles per hour came with the storm, and blew over everything in its path. Houses constructed of palm wood were blown away, but even homes built of cement block were destroyed because the concrete was not reinforced. Many people took refuge in concrete block churches and schools and were killed when walls collapsed and crushed them. At least 600 people were killed by the storm and 150,000 were left homeless.

The building-up process continues, and it was to this that the Newcomers and the relief mission contributed. The Newcomers stress that they were merely part of a coordinated team effort, and said their interest was stimulated by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Shenk who had worked on five previous missions. They joined the Shenks and the Rev. Roger Colvin. All are members of St. Mark's United Methodist Church, Mount Joy.

Once in the Dominican Republic, the Newcomers met other Lancastrians who were there on the same mission. Eventually the group numbered 56 from all parts of the United States and Canada. Sheryl explained that the purpose of the trip was "to meet as many health needs as possible. We met their physical needs and their spiritual needs as they wanted."

Sponsorship of their Medical Group Mission is by the Christian Medical Society, a non-denominational organization made up of doctors and dentists in the United States and Canada. Once there, the group was divided into two teams, a surgical team and a clinical group. The Newcomers were with the clinical group; and while they are not skilled in using medicine, they provided essential support services as the group traveled from village to village to offer their services.

Each day the team set up their clinic in a different village. Before their arrival, which was coordinated by the local church, one member of the church had sold tickets to those needing services. Sheryl noted that the tickets were used for two reasons. It encouraged only those who really needed the medical services to attend the clinic and it also helped the people keep their dignity. Adult tickets to the clinic cost 50 cents and children's tickets cost 25 cents.

Preston was traffic controller of the children's part of the clinic and it was his job to get the ticket holders ready to meet the doctor and nurses and to keep the flow of patients moving. Preston said tickets had been numbered, so he simply put the people in order as they arrived and made sure patients were ready to see the doctors.

About the team effort, Sheryl said, "We worked very well together and could set up the clinic very quickly in the villages. The relationship we formed was very special." The Mission used churches, schools or whatever buildings were available. In one village they set up in a bar; in another, they used a private home.

One of the most common medical problems encountered was parasites in children. Sheryl explained that mostly women and children attended the clinics. The women were frequently low in iron and vitamins. Sheryl said, "We gave out hundreds and hundreds of vitamins." She pointed out that women bear large families and the ones they saw were frequently pregnant or had recently given birth, explaining their vitamin and iron deficiencies.

Both Sheryl and Preston said there were many complaints of headaches and backaches. Sheryl said,



Sheryl Newcomer and her son Tim brought a few small items back with them as mementos of the ten-day relief mission to the Dominican Republic.

"They carry large loads on their backs and heads." Aspirin and other painkillers were usually prescribed.

Sheryl's job was working in the pharmacy, helping to dispense the medication as prescribed. She worked with two nurses and said she always checked before handing over the medicine to the patients. All the medicines were kept in wooden boxes for ease of storage, and most had been donated for use by the Mission.

"We didn't see anything really serious," Sheryl noted, adding that one of the most heart-wrenching things they encountered was malnutrition in children. "It was hard to take." Children frequently had skin rashes, and some were brought in simply for check-ups.

Asked about the continuing medical care these people are likely to receive, Sheryl expressed her concern about that. Often patients were given a 30-60 day supply of vitamins, but she said, "While they have it they feel better, and then they wait until another clinic comes."

Medical care is available in larger towns and cities, but transportation for most rural people is not possible. Sheryl said most of the towns they visited could expect to have access to a clinic at least twice a year.

For the people, the arrival of the clinic was a special time. Sheryl said, "They dressed up in their best clothes. It was almost festive for them."

Preston added, "I think the children were glad to come to the clinic and they tried to act real brave. They were really shy."

Part of their clinical group was dentists who had their work cut out for them. Sheryl kept records on the number of patients they saw in their clinics and, interestingly, the number of teeth pulled. Pulling teeth was the only procedure the dentists were equipped to do. The records for the dental clinic are: first day - 23 patients, 44 teeth pulled; second day - 60 patients, 107 teeth pulled; third day - 32 patients, 60 teeth; fourth day - 33 patients, 62 teeth; fifth day, 78 patients, 160 teeth; sixth day, 28 patients, 58 teeth.

Sheryl said the children found the dentists exciting and the "dentist always had a big audience." The dentist worked outside, usually under a tree or a temporary roof constructed to keep away the shade.

The Newcomers had nothing but praise for the Dominicans. "Even in their destitution, they would give you the shirt off their back - if they had one." Preston said.

He related a story he experienced in the evening when they had returned to the rented quarters in which they stayed. As he went for a walk over roads that had been washed away by Hurricane David, he saw a farmer chopping cornstalks. He said he crawled through the barbed wire which is used to keep animals away from property, walked to the man and began working. Newcomer said he made a few utterances in Spanish and communicated to the man that he grew sweet corn in the United States. After working together, the man began to check every ear of corn, picked out the ten best and offered them to Preston.



Preston is proud of a carving made from a coconut which was made in the Dominican Republic. He and his wife Sheryl spent 10 days there as part of a Medical Relief Mission.



Rev. Roger Colvin, left, and Bob Sherk talk with a patient at one of clinics the medical relief team set up in the Dominican Republic.

About the people, Sheryl noted, "They seem to be reasonably happy. The children entertain themselves. They play jacks with stones. I would love to take them some toys."

Preston said, "I don't understand who owns the land, but we saw a cooperative which was raising peppers, tomatoes, beans and rice, and acres and acres of onions. There were always a lot of people in the fields working." Sheryl added, "The harvesting is done primarily by men and children, since the mothers are busy in the homes with the other children." Preston noted that there was very little farm equipment used, and that wooden oxen carts carried produce to the train.

Sheryl said that as part of their ongoing agricultural program there are 60,000 acres to be opened for farming in which irrigation canals have been constructed. There is another 60,000-100,000 acres in which the government is in the process of building canals. "They are looking to the large acreage to help feed the people. After the second 60,000 acres is opened, they hope to export rice," she explained. Agriculture currently dominates their foreign trade picture, with sugar and sugar byproducts accounting for 32 per cent of their foreign earnings. Coffee and cacao earned 34 per cent and minerals earned 22 per cent. Over 80 per cent of their exports go to the United States.

There is 60 per cent unemployment on the island but Sheryl said, "They are basically self-sufficient. The people live on what they can grow." Some people have plots of land which are located outside their village. Fresh fruit is widely available and fish is plentiful for those living near the shore. Sheryl said, "The potential for good nutrition is there."

They also pointed out that the people on the island are not politically oppressed, and the government cooperated fully with their visit.

The Newcomers described the great amount of reconstruction work which must be done as a result of Hurricane David's destruction. Preston told of visiting the town of Juan Paron where three of the 500 houses were left standing, with nine capable of being repaired. He said the Mennonite Central Committee is helping people rebuilt these homes, with the goal of 599 homes over the next two years. "The people are doing their own rebuilding, with just six people directing the work. The people are excited about doing it."

The MCC is not giving the homes to the people but are requiring that they pay \$2.00 per month for 10

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Homestead
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