

It was my great pleasure to accompany the July 2006 trip participants to Zana, Peru. Zana is in sugar cane country and it is noted for its little candy-making industry. One morning, we visited the Senorita who sold her wares from her home. My Canadian companion bought a variety of home-made sweets and presented the Senorita with a 50 soles bill which was too large of a sum for her to give change for. We promised we would return within the day with the right amount of money. As we got back to the hotel, we gathered up the right amount of soles to pay for our purchase. When I returned that afternoon, Senorita was happy to see me again and before taking the payment, she filled a small basket with the same amount of candies we had bought that morning. I wondered if she had forgotten that we had already taken them home with us earlier, but she insisted that I accept the gift. Awed by her generosity, I decided my Canadian friends did not need to overload their sweet tooth, so I proceeded to give out the candies to Peruvians I met along the way back to the hotel.

Anna Maria Di Ponio

My Zana Experience

My time in Zana was a very memorable trip as I got to see Peru, learn about its culture, its reality and meet Peruvians in a way that I would never have experienced otherwise. I feel enriched by this experience and I am, therefore, grateful to Heart-Links for giving me this opportunity. This was presented as an awareness trip and certainly lived up to my expectations.

Learning about the Peruvian culture as it relates to Zana was an eye-opening experience for me and I'm not sure I've processed it all yet. At times, I was left with feelings of helplessness and despair at their living conditions and the plight of the women. The children are loving and affectionate despite their circumstances. .

On the other hand, I was inspired by many of the leaders we met. For one, Father Victor, in Reque whose leadership qualities I greatly admire. I was very impressed with all that he does for his community – the bakery, welding shop, children's program and the sewing group were some of his projects that we visited. Driving along with him from place to place, he was treated by people like a celebrity! The trip to Cajamarca was definitely one of the highlights -- along the scenic route the landscape was outstanding! Meeting Alfredo, who is a very special person, the campesinos, learning about the rural libraries and visiting their farms were unforgettable experiences. Another highlight was visiting with Lucho, his brother and mother on their farm, a wonderful family and a great visit. And what a great place for our group to watch the World Cup Final!

Thank you, Heart-Links and special thanks to our outstanding leaders, Anne-Marie, Carolyn and Vince. I thought your overall program of introducing the culture, the projects and work experience was excellent. Our time was well balanced with meeting leaders and learning of their special projects, visiting regions, farms, and homes of the people with down time for relaxation with informal activities of our choice.

Irene Faveri

Nearly two months after first arriving in Zaña, I m so happy to be back again visiting my friends here.

Coming to Peru with the Heartlinks group was a wonderful introduction to Peru, and two weeks was not enough time for me! I m staying in the country four more months to continue my adventures learning and living throughout Peru.

Back in Zaña again I found myself marveling at the beauty of the crumbling old churches in the fields; walking down the dusty streets being greeted by those who remember me; answering a thousand questions about Canada to curious children.

How can I ever forget Zaña, or Peru – I m still here!

Jennifer Elward

A Beautiful Day I Will Long Remember

After dinner Alfredo left the family room and returned with his guitar. He sang in Spanish, his eyes smiling, his body swaying even as he sat in a corner chair. As he sang, his little girl lay in a bed of comforters and blankets arranged by her mother a few feet away, but she resisted falling asleep. His son and wife listened with us as Alfredo's mellow voice soothed our souls. After he sang another song, our small choir, made up of seven members of the Trip Awareness Team, responded by sharing a Canadian song, "Land of the Silver Birch." The choir members had been learning some songs for a special presentation to our Peruvian friends that would take place at the end of our trip a couple of days later.

Alfredo shared another song while his wife, Rita, added the harmony with her beautiful voice. Responding, our choir sang a well-known Maritime arrangement of "I'se the B'y that Builds the Boat." Alfredo's eight-year-old son, Rumi, obliged and sang a child's song with many verses while his father accompanied. Although we were not able to understand all the words, from their laughter we could tell it was a very funny song. This night of music could have gone on forever.

Alfredo Mires is responsible for the organization and running of 712 rural “libraries” within the province of Cajamarca, Peru. He works closely with a network of coordinators who work, in turn, with the librarians in their areas. He became involved in this work because of his dream to publish works of indigenous people. He sought to preserve it and ensure its availability to as many as possible. This led to the creation of an Encyclopedia Campesina, covering customs, agricultural practices, first aid and medical remedies, history, legends, and more, currently consisting of some 30 titles. As one of its Special Projects this year, Heart-Links is assisting in the re-publication of twenty titles in the encyclopedia that will be distributed to each of the rural libraries. Alfredo has been recognized by the government for his outstanding contribution toward rural literacy.

The day had begun with an early morning trip in a taxi van to visit the rural libraries. Alfredo and I shared the front seat and got to know each other a bit. He saw the name “Marentette” on my knapsack and recognized it as the name of a priest he had befriended many years before. “Fr. Juan” was, in fact, my first cousin, Jack, with whom I have been very close. As a priest of the Diocese of London, Jack had spent a year and a half working near the town of Zana, Alfredo’s home town (and our home base). Alfredo explained that he and his family had been especially close to my cousin, during what had been a difficult time for Alfredo.

After a forty-minute drive, we picked up one of the rural librarians, a young man named Basilio. We were excited at the prospect of visiting the rural libraries and meeting the librarians. It was to be the first time that members of a Heart-Links Awareness Trip would have the opportunity to visit these libraries in person.

We found out that a rural library is a room in a librarian's two- or three-room house. The room would also be used for something else, but a portion of it would be dedicated to the use of the library. The "libraries" are heartbreakingly small: perhaps 25 to 75 books; the largest, connected with a school, has a hundred books. In many homes or areas, the one person who is able will read to those who are not.

On certain days a librarian may walk eight to twelve hours to remote areas to get books to people who anxiously await them. Where a "bookmobile" is available, it is a faithful donkey. These trips are not without dangers, from animals, storms, or robbers. Alfredo, who in younger years was a martial arts instructor, has trained the librarians (among others) in the art of self-defense. On returning from these trips, many of the librarians have to catch up on their farm work. In some cases they have been asked to be a librarian; in others they have taken up the work from a family member who was no longer able to continue. They each receive a short training session. Although they certainly could use it, they do not receive a sol for this work. The commitment of these librarians is hard to imagine!

At the end of the visit, Basilios invited our group to his home for a late lunch. A long white pressed tablecloth was placed over two plastic bags on the dirt floor. A colored cloth was placed perpendicular to it to accommodate our group of twelve. Simple benches and carefully cut pieces of logs provided the seating. Boiled potatoes from the garden, their skins intact, were laid on the tablecloths. A green coriander sauce was set out along with baked kernels of corn seasoned with oil and salt. Bowls of cornflower soup, each with a small piece of chicken, were served. Most families are not able to enjoy meat as part of their meals unless it is a very special occasion. Basilios entertained us by

playing his pan flute and having three of his sons dance in costume. I have been most fortunate to share in many beautiful and delicious meals, but I have rarely so enjoyed or been so moved as I was by this one.

After a long ride back to our hotel, and some sightseeing in Cajamarca, we went to join Alfredo for dinner at his home. Our time with Alfredo and his family was truly enjoyable. As the evening ended, I overcame my reluctance to sing alone in public and was moved to sing a favorite Irish blessing for Alfredo and his family, and for the rural librarians who are so dedicated to bringing the printed word over long dusty trails to eagerly waiting families:

May the road rise up to meet you;
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
And the rains fall soft upon your fields.
'Til we meet again, we meet again,
May God hold you in his hand.

Margaret Marentette