

Our Dear Brothers & Sisters and Friends,

2014 February thru May

Our newsletter is late again and we apologize. We thought months couldn't continue as busy as those we have been having recently, but we had another very busy February (and March, April, and May). We are thankful for all opportunities to serve God, His servants, and those who are seeking Him.

February:

Carol Bird Tomkins

Our saddest and most overshadowing news during February is the death of Dwight's mother, (Eugenia) Carol Bird Tomkins. Hunny was always a joy during her 96 years of life that our Lord blessed her with on this earth. She was a person who loved to meet and build relationships with people. Even in her last year and her last days, she would rather enjoy people than dwell on her own discomfort and trials. We have no doubt that she will love Heaven with the joy of fellowship without end and the singing of praises to the One who gave His life so that she could be there forever. They will undoubtedly make her an official greeter so that she can ask, "And where are you from?" We have included her obituary and the inside of the handout given at the Celebration of Life at the A&M church of Christ in College Station, TX.



In Texas, before the Celebration of Life for Dwight's mom, from left: Kathy (Daniel's wife), Daniel, Jessica, Addisen, Lydia, Brendan, Mary, Chris (Lydia's husband), Caitlyn, Rebecca, Dwight, and Tom (Dwight's oldest brother). Addy, Bren, and Caity are Jessica's children.

Visitors

Ron Carter, one of our first connections to Catacamas, arrived on Feb. 6th for a five day work trip and we were privileged to share a meal and visit with him and his traveling companion, Steve White. Ron came over again to spend some time sharing the beginnings and history of the Escuela el Buen Samaritano (the Good Samaritan School) with Joanne. She plans to write an article for the Christian newspapers and magazines in hopes of getting more exposure for the school and, prayerfully, more funding and student sponsorships.

We were late in getting our supporter tax letters out this year, which were carried back to the states by Ron Carter and mailed by his generosity. This is the first year we have been personally responsible for these letters. Now that we have the form developed, and have worked out a more accurate system of record keeping, we expect next year's letters to be done by early January. If anyone did not receive a support/donation letter who should have, or if your letter is inaccurate, please let us know and we will get the right form to you as quickly as possible.

Naples, Jacksboro, and Wichita Falls, TX

What do these three towns in Texas have in common? The churches there love to help the work in Olancho. A mission team from Jacksboro, TX and the other congregations arrived on Monday, Feb. 17th to work with several ministries of David and Suyapa Chacón. Joanne and Andrew rode in on the chartered bus to ride back with the group, since Joanne has formed close friendships with a few of the ladies in the group and was not expecting to have another opportunity during the week to visit with them. Normally, Joanne helps to drive on the days the group travels to the remote mountains, but with Andrew in tow it would be more complicated. So Dwight would be driving the group this year, since he is not teaching on Fridays. In the meantime, one of the father's of a houseparent at Por Los Ninos died Sunday afternoon while working on live electrical wires at PLN. After dropping Joanne at the 6 am bus rendezvous, Dwight went to the death vigil some distance from town. When it was time for the burial he made two trips with materials and then people to carry them to the cemetery. At the Monday evening request of David, Joanne drove the group Wednesday morning and Dwight took over for the afternoon so Andrew could get his nap. As is often the case in Honduras, the daily schedule didn't fall as expected and Dwight was long into the night carrying the group to various locations before he got home. He very much enjoyed the time, not only because they are a delightful group, but also because David Chacón gave an inspiring lesson on Job. No one could have given a more apt lesson than someone who has gone through the trials that have recently befallen David.

Dwight to Florida and Texas

Then, at the encouragement of our daughters, Dwight decided he needed to make an immediate trip to Orlando, FL where his aging mother was failing. Our youngest, Rebecca, took two vacation days and flew to visit her grandmother Tuesday and Wednesday, and our other three daughters and one husband were planning to drive there Friday. He had a ticket to fly Friday when we got the news of his mother's death at 10:38pm Thursday night. He arrived in Orlando at 11:30pm Friday night, only hours after his second brother, Ted, who was flying in for the weekend to visit his mother ahead of a work conference in Orlando. So, three of her four sons were present to honor her memory at a Sunday memorial in Orlando. At the same time, our five children were organizing a celebration for Hunny at the A&M church of Christ where she had been a member for over 30 years. Dwight elected to change his original return to Honduras on Tuesday, and instead flew to TX to support our children and his mother's memory at the Celebration of Life Thursday afternoon. He returned to Orlando, Friday, and to Honduras, Saturday.

So! Joanne (and Andrew) did end up driving the group to the mountains on Friday, and didn't get home until nearly 7 pm. Since Andrew had had no nap that day he was fast asleep by 7. Saturday the two spent a good portion of the day tracking down requested items for the group, and preparing to host special guests at our house for the united worship service that would take place on Sunday. But the guest preacher, Selvin Monterosso, an instructor at Baxter Institute in Tegucigalpa, was bringing more people than originally planned and opted to drive in early Sunday morning instead. The combined worship was hosted by our Catacamas congregation, the El Colegio church of Christ, and totaled roughly 350 in attendance.

School at Por Los Niños

Dwight is enjoying getting back into the swing of a daily school regime. He has more students than ever, in fact more than he had tables, chairs, computers, UPS batteries or working monitors. But he was able to cobble together most of what was needed and has had some students working together. One major problem is that one of his new external students in the third grade does not even know his full alphabet or numbers. The Honduran government requires that each student be passed whether he has the skills to go further or not, and prohibits a student regressing to an earlier grade. But Franklin has a good heart, is a quick learner, and seems to be very happy to be in the school at Por Los Niños. Dwight hopes so because he is giving him lots of extra work to help him catch up. He is not sure how he ever got so far behind in his schooling. On the other hand Dwight was very happy when he saw another Franklin, also an external student and a 4th grader, on the first day of school. He had to leave early last year because the life of his family was threatened and they had to flee from Catacamas. He is an exceptional student and is fun to push academically.

The Director of the school, William Guerrero, missed the first month of classes to travel in the USA for the second time in his life. While it was a wonderful time of relaxation and seeing new sights (he saw his first snow ever in a very strange location - New Orleans), he is glad to be back. And we are very glad to have him back.

One of the joys of teaching 1st through 6th grade is seeing the students progress. Marian José, one of his 5th graders, was probably the poorest academically in her class, through her 2nd and 3rd grades, especially in Mathematics. She now completes her weekly exams faster and often times more accurately than anyone in the 5th or 6th grades. And that is even with the progress that everyone else is making!



Erick demonstrating his computer prowess.

Joanne's dissertation

The final, time consuming note for the month of February is that Joanne has submitted the completed draft of her dissertation to her committee Chair for review! Her Chair commented in the public discussion forum that she expects Joanne to be defending within weeks. It has been a long time coming, and still doesn't register as a reality.

March:

The Dry Season

While December, January, and February are considered part of the dry season, it peaks in March thru mid-May. It gets hot - hot enough to make a Texan sweat. The sun is directly overhead and will soon be to the north of us. So at noon, it is difficult to find shade unless there is a tree near by. Many of the trees lose their leaves, the grass dries up, and

almost everyone starts their conversation with “¿Que calor?” or “Is it hot enough for you?” And it is dry. Jeans dry in a couple of hours where a few months ago it would take all day (or several days in the wet season). We often have power outages because the lakes behind the dams are getting low (hydroelectric power is by far the major source of electricity for Honduras.) Here in Catacamas we also have water shortages because the water from the mountain behind our house is greatly reduced. Therefore it needs to be partitioned to the different areas of the town. This is also the time when the farmers burn their fields. The sky is hazy with smoke and we will often find ashes on things that have been left uncovered. As we get closer to May, the smoke will fill the air. Oh, did we mention the dust? Everything quickly gets covered with a grainy layer of dust.

On the other hand, the heat isn't that bad and by 3 pm it is already starting to cool down. The skies are less cloudy, the stars brighter, and the nights tend to be cooler than during the rainy season. The water is clearer now than at any time during the year since dirt is not being carried into the streams by torrential rains, but instead it is all coming from springs in the mountains. Did we mention that it is just amazing how fast clothes can dry!? We can wash whites and they stay white.

And the fruits and flowers! Watermelons are at their sweetest during this time (more sun, less rain means more sugar). Mangoes are starting to appear in the markets. Avocados are plentiful as are tomatoes. This is the time that the marañón (cashew in English) is fruiting. One of Dwight's favorite beverages is a juice made from tamarind pods. The tree overhanging our back wall is loaded this year with the pods, so he is in 'Hog Heaven'. The bougainvillas are groaning under their load of flowers. Everywhere we look (and with fewer leaves we can see farther) we see trees in bloom. The most popular colors are pink and bright yellow and as the dry season progresses, red and orange will predominate. All in all, we can't remember what we could possibly like about the rainy season.



Tamarindo pods

An Elder Visits

We had the honor of enjoying the company of Mac Safley, an elder for the congregation in Raleigh, NC and our liaison to that congregation for one evening. He came in with his translator and earst-while companion, Dagoberto Nuñez. He always brings things that he knows we are missing from the states, Braille Bibles for a blind member of our congregation, and this time, a special gift for Dwight – a projector for the computer. Dwight is looking forward to getting to use it soon. Mac came in to teach and work with a group of preachers from the Amacuapa/Manto area over the mountains west of us. Unfortunately we were not able to spend more time with him because we left the next day for a mission's conference in Siguatepeque, a city about 2 hours north of Tegucigalpa and pleasantly cool due to its relatively high altitude.

Our Turn to Visit

Steve and Diana Teel, who serve as President and First Lady of the Baxter Institute in Tegucigalpa, had invited us to stay at the new President's house on the Baxter campus sometime when we are traveling through. We took advantage of the offer on our way to the conference and thoroughly enjoyed both their beautiful lodgings and their wonderful company. They have much to give to the campus and we are very thankful they are here in Honduras. If you have not visited the campus we feel that it is one of the most beautiful places in Central America. And the students are some of the best in Latin America. If you are interested in reading more about Baxter, here is a [link to a recent newsletter](#)

Mission's Conference

This was a time for us to network and relax with fellow workers. They have good advice on working with the government and local Hondureños and, at times, encouraging lessons all in English. Mainly for us it is a chance to get a way from the daily work and be renewed. We are thankful for the many people who love and want to serve the people here in Honduras. Our grandson, Andrew, was able to make more contacts than us. He enjoyed playing with the other children and taking part in the many activities in the secure atmosphere of the conference center.

An Elder Teaches

One of the high points of this month was the visit of our dear friend, Noé Perez. He taught excellent lessons on the relationship of churches and elders (pastors). Without elders, it is difficult for a church to mature in the way our Lord wants. He was one of the first elders for a congregation in Honduras, at the Guanacaste iglesia de Cristo in Tegucigalpa. Because of the leadership and maturity of their eldership, they have come through many struggles.



Andrew "Bam-Bam"

A Mother and Daughter Visit

In this case they happen to be the same person. We were delighted to have Rebecca, our daughter and Andrew's mother, come visit for a week. She had lived with us during our first 14 months here while attending high school and had lots of friends to visit and lots of memories to revisit. On the downside of that, she took Andrew back to Texas with her, and to Dwight's chagrin, Joanne went with her. Joanne was in Texas until the end of April and we hope that you got to visit with her while she was there.

April:

Joanne accomplishes Much in Texas

It is incredible how much Joanne can accomplish in a trip to the states. Some of the more time consuming issues were clearing up association banking problems, meeting with and preparing a shipment of clothes and donated computers from a private shipping firm in Houston, and clearing up

tax issues with the state comptroller. Some of the more fun times were preparing, mailing and delivering gifts to our supporters, a trip to our cousins in Port Arthur, participating in weekly game and dinner nights with our children, spending a weekend with our daughter Mary from Abilene, and watching grandson Andrew on most days. At the same time she was dealing with whooping cough and didn't know it.

Dwight Loses Weight

No, he was not pining away to nothing while awaiting Joanne's return, but he did successfully lose a little weight. He continued to teach at Por Los Niños while assisting others with computer problems. While Joanne was gone we felt it best not to have any classes at the house. He has also started a reading class (in Spanish) for children in the market. For some time it was well attended as each of the 8 to 10 people attending would get their chance to read from the book El Leon, la Bruja, y el Ropero (The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe), but lately fewer have been coming. Interestingly, there was a seminar that all the teachers had to attend, where they discussed how poor the reading skills are in Olancho, even compared to the rest of Honduras.

Dwight's Sunday School class continues to learn the book of Acts. They are looking forward to the competition at the end of the class, titled "Hechos expertos" which could be translated "Acts Experts" or "Making Experts" loosely based on the game show "Who Wants to be a Millionaire". So far he has not received any donations for prizes. If you would like to donate things that 10 thru 13 year olds would enjoy or money to buy such things, please let us know.

May:

Honduras Celebrates Joanne's Return

Dwight was very glad to have Joanne back in Catacamas and it appears that all of Catacamas was also. At least there were lots of fireworks and rockets going off the day after her return. We then realized that maybe it was a May Day celebration, known here as The Day of the Worker and in more temperate climates as the beginning of summer.

Joanne is back on her dissertation and finished her final chapter within two weeks of returning. She also enjoyed catching up on ministry accounting and a trip into Tegus to spend three productive days helping another missionary with book-keeping, filing, and adoption documents.



Pre-teen class

Leon

We had the pleasure of hosting Leon Philpott for dinner. He and his wife, Lyla, lived here in Catacamas for two years. Unfortunately they had to leave before we arrived. It would have been a blessing for them to have been here when we came. After dinner we went to the Central Park for our traditional ice cream cone with visitors. They have remodeled much of it in the last six months and if you haven't been here recently, it is very different. Though, very thankfully, the grand, old Ceiba tree is still the centerpiece of the park. There we met the rest of the Journey Missions group. Among the group was Steve Edlhuber and his mother-in-law, with whom we had arrived 6 years ago on the bus.

Deaths

Besides Dwight's mother, there have been quite a number of deaths in our lives. A former employee of Por Los Niños was working on some electrical wires when he fell off the ladder. His son, Noé, is one of the house-parents there and his grand-daughter, Caterin, was one of Dwight's special students at PLN.

Just a few weeks ago, two preachers died, one, Carlos Martinez in San Pedro Sula, from cancer and the other, Rigoberto Vargas in Tegucigalpa, from a heart attack (we think). Carlos was active in preaching and teaching and often taught at Baxter Institute in Tegucigalpa. Rigoberto was a very special friend. We met him the first time we came to Honduras in 1996 when he took us on a tour of the prison in downtown Tegucigalpa. [It was destroyed in the flooding that accompanied Hurricane Mitch in 1998.] Dwight



Caterin grieving for her grandfather.

worked with him on day visits to the prisons until he had the chance to work with him for three weeks in the National Penitentiary in late 2012. It was a wonderful experience for Dwight. Rigo worked in the prisons and rehabilitating the prisoners after they were released for over 25 years. His loss to us personally and in that work will be deeply felt.

Births

But there have also been births into the kingdom of Heaven. A friend, Daniel, was baptized on March 16th. He has a great servant's heart and a great desire to continue to learn. He attends with us at the El Colegio congregation. Javier Perez baptized three people one sunny April morning not long before Easter. We were honored to be able participate in those baptisms. Their pictures are below.

Rainy Season

On the 20th of May, the rainy season started. It had been cloudy for a couple days prior and the temperature was somewhat lower, but that afternoon it sounded like someone was bowling in our attic – and we don't have an attic. Typically it doesn't start with a heavy rain, but with light rains that prep the soil and that gently wash the ash from the burnt fields into the ground. It also allows the plants to start growing before we start getting torrential downpours.



Rigo and his son, Jonathan, raising money to give the prisoners and their families a Christmas meal.

Quiet Celebration

On the 31st of May, we celebrated arriving 6 years ago in Catacamas.

Prayers

We thank our Lord that our residency renewals are in process to get our residency status extended. Pray for our health and safety and that all goes well with the classes. Continue to keep our dear friend, David Chacón, in your prayers. Also please pray for our friend, Javier Perez, a preacher in the village of Jicaro Gordo. And finally please pray for the family of Lidio Saenz.

In Him, our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that your summertime will come with profligate abundance and blessings that only our Lord can give.

Love, Dwight and Joanne Tomkins



Marcio with Daniel in el Río Talgua



Berlina, Liana, Daniel, and Javier in el Río Boquerón

