

January 20, 2010

Dear Friends,

Larry and Robin are back in the U.S. after our two and a half years in Costa Rica. We arrived 'home' in Port Angeles on Dec. 14. It was good to see friends here and be able to celebrate Christmas with family.

We do have another 'home' in Costa Rica—not a house but many friends who were difficult to leave. It was good for all of us to have several months to adjust to our upcoming change of homes. We pretty much had to promise to return to visit before they would let us leave. It's a blessing how we grew roots in each other's lives as we lived among each other, especially as brothers and sisters in Christ. We had to say farewell (not goodbye!) to so many people during the last month. It never got any easier, but we know we'll see them again, either in Costa Rica, the U.S., or in our eternal home.

During our last few months in Santo Tomás we continued with our regular routine of teaching and learning. It was a joy to work with each student and we savored each class, knowing that it would end soon. Larry was excited that two young men were able to get jobs at a call center because their English was good enough. This is a very good paying job there, and would be an economic boon to two young men without families nearby.

Robin helped Mylinda Baits by sewing vinyl covers for a couple of large foam shapes to be used as floor toys for the young children at the Butterfly Transformation Center at the Mansion of Light church. She also taught the Center's director how to sew these so she could teach others and cover the other foam toys. Robin continued the sewing lessons for three adult women (who also came for English classes).

Each week we served cookies and fruit juice to each of our students as a way to relax at the end of class and visit with each other in English, Spanish, and 'Spanglish.' Robin baked many different kinds of cookies over time, and lots of students wanted her to translate the recipes for them. During the last few weeks she finished the translating, had it proofread, and had copies printed. During our last week with students each one received a copy of the booklet, as did each family in the church and a few other friends. One student had asked if there would be a photo on the cover so they would have a photo of us. The accompanying photo in front of the Costa Rican flag is the one that ended up on the cover. We ended up giving away 70 copies of the booklet.

Another project that had dragged on over two years was writing down and translating the recipes for the meals the church served to work groups and other visitors. Pastor Betty's husband Aziel had suggested Robin do this, and the women in the kitchen were very helpful in listing ingredients, giving quantities, and dictating instructions for each dish. This cookbook was printed in both English and Spanish, with the goal of selling the copies to raise funds for the ongoing church construction. Without the patient help and proofreading of several women it couldn't have been done.

We gave away almost all of our teaching supplies and lots of other things before we left. Each time we'd returned from the U.S., we'd had at least a few pounds of children's books and reading texts in our luggage. Thankfully we found places to donate most of the materials.

For the first time in 35 years we faced having to clean out a rental home, and in addition we needed to divest ourselves of all the furnishings. (We deliberately hadn't acquired any more than we could help.) A few things were given away but the majority would become the responsibility of the church. That really freed us up from having to make many decisions. But God is certainly good—He arranged that one of the members of the church would rent the house over Christmas to use as extra bedrooms for visitors, and they took on the job of moving everything when they were done with it. We were able to stay there our last night, and leave the next morning with just our suitcases!!

After a month in Port Angeles we are slowly beginning to shape our life here. We've adjusted again to the cold damp and dark of a northwest winter instead of the spring-like temperatures and sunshine of Costa Rica's Central Valley. We have rested a lot without getting involved in too much. This seems to be the big 'retirement' change that happens to so many. When we left Port Angeles we were still on the 'school schedule' we'd been on for over 35 years, though we'd retired from full-time teaching six years earlier. We adjusted ourselves to a schedule that worked in Costa Rica, and now we're back in Port Angeles without a fixed schedule. This is an adjustment that will take time to make. There are so many opportunities to volunteer, but we are trying to take it slow, not get over-involved, and let God lead the way.

Thank you for your interest, support and prayers over the past two and a half years. You are part of the 'safety net' that freed us to live our life and faith in Costa Rica. We appreciate each and every one of you!!

Que Dios les bendiga. May God bless you.

Larry and Robin Sweeney

