

MOVING MOUNTAINS

A Monthly Publication Providing News and Current Updates on the Expanding Work of CTW/LifeQwest Ministries and our Partners

On the Isthmus of Panama

I arrived in Panama, the crossroads of the Americas, at noon today. Panama is the narrowest and southernmost country in Central America — an isthmus that bridges two continents and provides access to two oceans. Nearly one-third of the 3.4 million people who call Panama home are impoverished and live on less than a dollar a day. Of the several dozen native tribes that inhabited Panama when the Spanish explorer Rodrigo de Bastidas first set foot on the isthmus in 1501, only seven remain. Today, Panama is a study in contrasts between things ancient and modern. Just a short distance from the skyscrapers and malls of Panama City, indigenous peoples still paddle dugout canoes and live in bohíos — thatched-roofed, open-sided dwellings.

Like many of you, I first learned about Panama in geography class. For me it was the most memorable Central American country that we studied because of the engineering marvel known as the Panama Canal. The idea of a canal across the isthmus was first conceived in 1525 by King Charles V of Spain and later became a reality at a cost of thousands of lives. On August 15, 1914, the first ship sailed through the canal, inaugurating the link between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

Panama again blipped on my radar after US forces captured and

arrested Colonel Antonio Manuel Noriega, military governor of Panama and de facto leader, and imprisoned him in Miami in the first few days of 1990. A few months after his arrest my mentor, Dr. Rudy Hernandez, traveled to Miami and led Noriega to faith in Christ. In the months that followed I read some of Noriega's handwritten letters to Dr. Hernandez in which he talked about his life and new-found faith in Christ.

And now, I am in Panama — here to visit my old friend Jerry Smith with whom I worked for years in Mongolia. Jerry has set up a new base of operations here and I have come to spend a couple of days with him to explore new options for our ever-increasing numbers going out on mission each summer. It's fantastic to have so many students and adults serving around the world each summer, but it has created new challenges for us. So, I am trusting that God will open additional doors of opportunity for us to serve Him and make Him known through our initiatives in the Western Hemisphere. In about an hour I will fly from Panama City, the capital of Panama, to David, Panama's second largest city and the capital of Chiriquí Province. Jerry has arranged for me to meet pastors and ministry leaders and also to visit a prison for teenage inmates. I look forward to discovering what the Lord may have in store for us on the isthmus of Panama.

By Omar Garcia
Guest Missionary



isthmus | ɪsm s|
noun (pl. -muses)
a narrow strip of land with sea on either side,
forming a link between two larger areas of land.
• (pl. -mi |-m |) Anatomy a narrow organ, passage,
or piece of tissue connecting two larger parts.
ORIGIN mid 16th cent.: Latin, from Greek isthmos.

The Real Beauty of Panama



The view from my hotel room

Panama is unquestionably one of the most beautiful countries I have visited. It's the rainy season here — and the fruit of each drop shows in the amazing panorama of colorful flowers accented against lush green trees with bromeliad rain-gauges clinging to their trunks. I am staying at a quaint little hotel nestled beneath the shadow of a dormant volcano named Baru, the highest point in the country. In the surrounding mountains, indigenous peoples work on coffee plantations and farms that produce an abundance of crops in the rich volcanic soil. The view outside my hotel room looks like something out of a Thomas Kinkadee canvas. It all seems more than a little surreal. This is Panama, a country blessed with more than its share of natural beauty.



I enjoyed meeting Chigri, a special needs kid cared for by Victor and his staff.

Today, I found an even greater beauty in Panama in the faces of the poor and neglected and those who care for them. This morning, my friends Jerry and Susan and their Pastor introduced me to a man who cares for throw-away kids. These kids are not orphans. They are kids who either escaped or were rescued from abusive homes or ended up on the streets because they were no longer wanted at home. In the course of our conversation, Victor, the director of the home where these kids live, said *"I have the kids that nobody wants."* But what impressed me even more about Victor is that he sees the beauty and recognizes the

potential in each of these kids, including those with special needs. Victor is a guy who believes in these kids so much that he has labored tirelessly and on a shoestring budget to give them a future and a hope. And, he has done this faithfully for the past thirty years. That is a beautiful thing.



Angelica's old home. (above)

After spending three hours with Victor, we drove from the mountains to David, the capital of Chiriquí Province, to visit a prison for teenage boys and then an orphanage. Once again, I saw the real beauty of Panama in the faces of those who have given their lives to care for troubled boys and vulnerable orphans. At the end of the day we made one more stop at the home of a poor family that has faced more than their share of challenges. The family lived in a hovel made of scrap wood for years. As Angelica became increasingly crippled by severe arthritis, her husband began to build her a new home — a palace by comparison at about 500 square-feet. What impressed me most is how he did it. Over the years Angelica's husband purchased two or three cinder blocks at a time as he could afford them. Little by little their new home started taking shape, each new block a beautiful testimony to this man's love for his family. (below) Cont'd



Along the outskirts of Volcán, Panama

In the meantime, Angelica's daughter Lourdes had three surgeries to repair her cleft palate. My friends Jerry and Susan are paying for the braces that Lourdes must wear before her final surgery. And they are blessing the family by purchasing the three windows for their new home and adding a toilet that Angelica can access with her wheelchair. That's a beautiful thing.

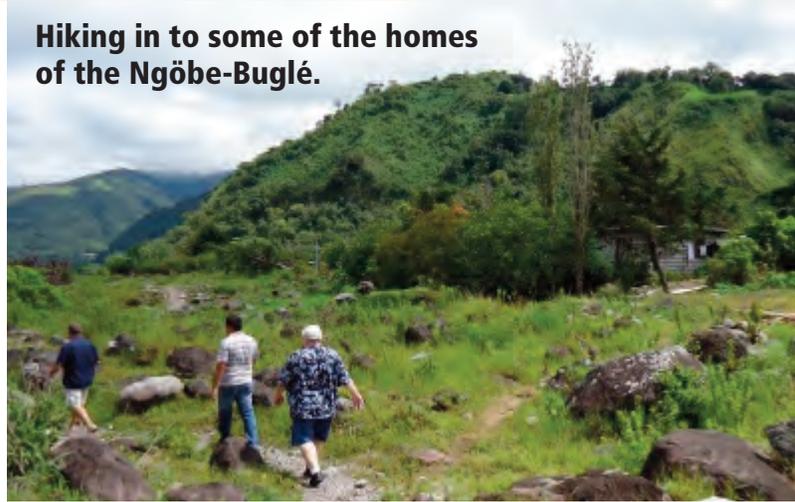
So, the beauty of Panama runs much deeper than its flora and fauna and its mountains and meadows. The real beauty of Panama can be seen in its people — especially those who are living out what it means to be a Christ-follower by quietly and selflessly loving and serving others without recognition.

Among the Ngöbe-Buglé

The best way to get to know both people and places is by walking slowly, which is exactly what we did this morning. We parked the car and took a stroll through the ragged outskirts of Volcán — the place that many Ngöbe-Buglé families call home. Of the several dozen native tribes that inhabited Panama when Spanish explorers first set foot here in 1501, only seven remain. Of those seven, the Ngöbe-Buglé are the most populous, numbering almost 200,000. Like the other remaining tribes, the Ngöbe-Buglé are struggling to maintain their cultural identity. For the most part, they continue to live in much the same way as they have throughout the centuries, relying almost exclusively on subsistence agriculture. The Ngöbe-Buglé also maintain their own comarca, an autonomous region much like a reservation.

In recent years, many of the Ngöbe-Buglé have been forced to leave their comarca in an effort to find ways to survive. Hundreds of families have made their way from mountain regions to nearby towns where they live as squatters and work for slave wages. The impression I have after talking to people in the area is that the Ngöbe-Buglé (and the other native peoples) are treated like the Dalits in India. They are regarded as Panama's lowest caste and treated accordingly. And yet, like any of us, they simply want to survive and to give their children the opportunity for a better life.

Hiking in to some of the homes of the Ngöbe-Buglé.



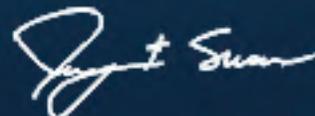
One woman we met today told us that she is working in a local restaurant and trying to save the money to get electricity to her corrugated metal hovel so that her kids can have light to do their schoolwork. She said that she can no longer afford to keep buying candles. To make things even more challenging, her 21 year-old daughter lives with her. This young girl has four children of her own and a fifth on the way. Remember these women the next time you think your life is hard and then pray for them! After visiting with this family I told my friends Jerry and Susan and their Pastor that Kingsland would provide the money for this hard-working mother to get electricity — a mere one-hundred dollars for us but a fortune to her. The local pastor will discreetly work with her to get electricity in the coming days.

My heart especially goes out to the children. Seeing and playing with them reminded me that they are indeed "precious in His sight." My hope is that we can engage in working with the Ngöbe-Buglé people on future trips to Panama. They deserve the opportunity to hear the story of Jesus and to be affirmed and encouraged that there are no Dalits in the kingdom of God. Today was a good day. I am glad that we took the time to walk slowly among the Ngöbe-Buglé because God once again showed me that the real beauty of Panama is in its people — and that all people deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.



5 WAYS YOU CAN HELP TODAY!

CTW LifeQwest is a ministry you can trust, and there are many ways you can help those who need it most. We've spent the last 17 years in the mission field organizing and establishing programs and resources geared toward making much of our mission work 'Self-Sufficient'.



1) PRAY. PRAY. PRAY.

Pray without ceasing! We ask for your prayers for boldness to preach the Gospel, for His wisdom and guidance, provision, grace and peace as we seek to serve God around the globe.

2) DONATE NOW BY CHECK OR ONLINE

We depend upon God through His people to provide the financial resources necessary to preach the Gospel, feed the hungry, care for the sick, give clean water, clothe the naked, visit those who are alone. Your gift today allows us to follow Christ's commands in Matthew 25.

3) MONTHLY GIVING MADE EASY!

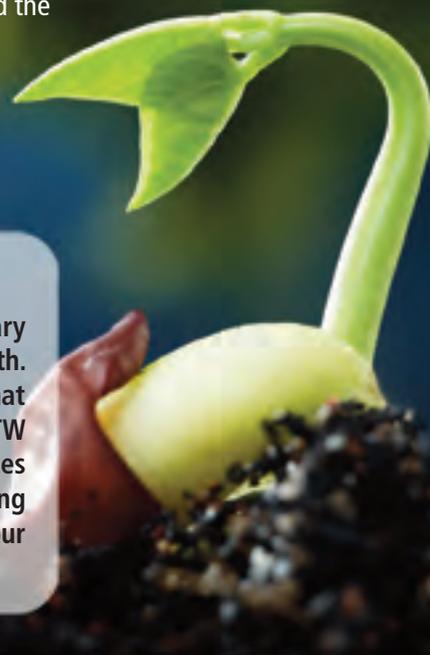
Make it really easy by setting up your monthly donations once online and have the secure payments made automatically! Simply visit our website at LifeQwest.org and choose either PayPal or Acceptiva to set up automatic monthly giving.

4) VOLUNTEER

We offer opportunities to visit various ministry operations here in the USA and around the globe with our 'Vision Treks'. Individuals and/or groups are welcome to take one of these life-changing journeys to see 'Hand-On' how God is moving through CTW LifeQwest and our partner ministries.

5) GIFTS IN-KIND & TRUSTS

Donating stocks, bonds, artwork, real estate, or precious metals is a great way to monetarily support CTW LifeQwest while maximizing your tax savings. Both you and the ministry benefits! By transferring assets to CTW LifeQwest you can maintain tax benefits and the ministry can receive a greater value than the cash value.



NOTICE

**WE NEED TO
HEAR FROM
YOU SOON!**

NEWSLETTER RENEWAL

We are pleased to provide you with this complimentary subscription of the CTW LifeQwest newsletter each month. It's our prayer that you're blessed and encouraged by what you see God doing through the many outreaches of CTW LifeQwest. We want to be good stewards of the resources entrusted to us, so if you would like to continue receiving this faith-filled publication, simply contact us through our website. www.LifeQwest.org

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