

Reflection by Dr. Alex Escobar on his trip to Bolivia, May 2001

We were able to make medical house calls. Overall, I would say that these experiences were the most significant event for those who went on the trip. For me, it was like stepping back in history.

I accompanied a health worker to various homes located in the hills that surrounded Ambana (a small village we stayed in for most of our time in Bolivia). The terrain is rugged and that is often difficult for patients to come to the health center from the outlying communities. As a result, the health workers traveled daily on dirt bikes (off-road motorcycles) across uneven dirt roads to reach their patients. I was struck by the dedication of these workers and their ability to connect with those in the community.

The man I traveled with, Don Simion, was a soft-spoken and incredibly patient man. He began by asking how the patient's home life was, and whether or not they were getting along with their spouse.

He calmly listened as one woman complained of her rheumatoid arthritis and her constant pain. Her wrinkled face and slightly hunched body deceived me into thinking that she was much older than she was. I was surprised to find out that she was only 42, and then surprised again to find out that she was the mother of ten.

Don Simeon slowly explained what medicines she could use in her native Aymaran tongue. Although I could not understand the words, I felt the sense of calmness he was trying to impart to his patient. In the end, they agreed that she would come to the health center and receive the medications she needed.

As we left their small home, her husband approached us with a huge pile of kindling on his back. Don Simeon talked for a short time with this man about his wife's medical condition, and Simeon asked him to take this into consideration in their home life.

Life in the Andes is hard for the people who live there. These health workers have dedicated themselves to trying to make life a little better for those around them. Their hard work and genuine desire to help others was an inspiration to us all.