

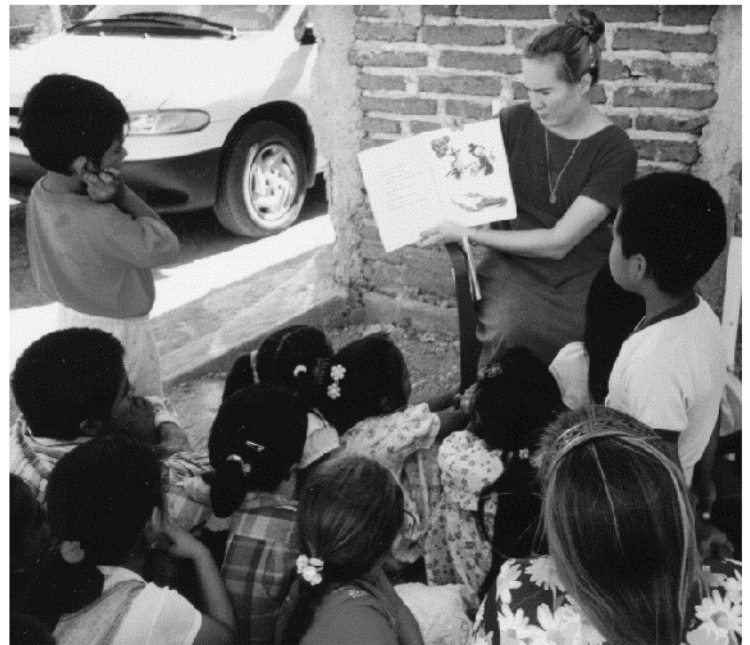
Bible School In Pueblo Mayo

Ever since the story of the Tarahumara appeared last April in the Special Edition of *Believers News*, we've had people asking us, "When you go back to Pueblo Mayo, may I go with you?" I can't blame them for wanting to shake hands with Brother José, and eat tortillas with Sister Henriquetta, right as she takes them from the fire. When I recall the time I've spent with them over the past three years, "homesick" is the only word that I can think of to describe my own feelings.

It had been almost a year since I'd driven the dusty streets of the *ejido* (neighborhood), and I was wanting to go back. What's more, there were friends in Tennessee and in Arizona that were ready to go with me. We decided that we would do a day of 'vacation Bible school' for the children of Pueblo Mayo, and if time permitted, we could do a similar day of activities at the church in Obregon, about 30 miles away. We finally set a date for the trip – October – but weeks before that, we began to put together all the materials we would need for the activities we'd planned.

Here in Tennessee, Rebekah, Stephanie, Erica, and myself began preparing the Bible-theme crafts, and putting together workbooks which we would use in conjunction with the excellent Animated Bible Stories videos (in Spanish) that a family had generously donated for the Sunday school in Pueblo Mayo. In addition to the crafts, we planned to have several games with prizes (designed so that every child would be sure to win!). The Sunday school classes at Happy Valley Church decorated special gift bags for each of the 80 children we expected to attend.

Meanwhile, in Tucson, Robyn (who had already been to Pueblo Mayo twice) was cutting out stand-up figures, and buying prizes. Two weeks before we were to leave for Mexico, Sarah, who was moving to Tucson from Colorado just days before the trip, was added to the passenger list. We were now a total of six, and we had to fit a small mountain of Bible school materials, our clothes, a new TV/VCR to replace the one that was stolen a few months ago from our house in Pueblo Mayo, and ourselves into a mini van! (This was no small task, I assure you.) Somehow, we were all ready on time. When we pulled out of the driveway in Tucson, on our way south, I knew that the next week was sure to be exciting and full of surprises for us all.



by Angela Smith

Things went well until mid-afternoon when we were on a desolate (by which I mean that there was no city nearby) stretch of road between Hermosillo and Guaymas. A tire on the van blew out, and we found ourselves in the large median between the north and south highways. We eventually were able to change the shredded tire, but the whole episode put us off our schedule by several hours. By the time we arrived at our hotel in Navojoa, it was very late at night. We didn't see how we would be able to have Bible school the next day, without first having a few hours to get tables set up, and games organized. The next morning, our first stop in the *ejido* was at Sister Carmen's house, where I tried to explain this change in schedule to her. Sister Carmen is the Sunday school teacher, and with her husband, Noah, she watches over the Tarahumara when we're not there. But my explanation was wasted. She assured me that the children were most anxious to get together that morning. They had been told that I was arriving with friends, and they were already at the church waiting for us! I did not want to disappoint them, so we applied ourselves and readied for a busy day.

Brother Magadaleno, the pastor, allowed us to have all the activities at the church, since it's clearly the biggest building, and when we pulled up, sure enough, many of the children were already waiting outside. As I got out, Anna and Marcela came running to me, and I thought my heart would burst as I pulled them to me, so incredibly happy that they had not forgotten me!



Sister Pancha and Robyn Daulton

Stephanie Blair and
Rebekah Arrowood

Once we gathered the children inside the church, Brother Magdaleno opened our day with a word of prayer. The girls and I got to work setting up tables and dividing the crafts, while the children watched a Bible story on video. Then, for the next couple of hours, we worked nonstop, but it was as much fun for us as it was for the children.

When we broke for lunch and a rest, I went with Sister Carmen to see two of the Tarahumara babies that she said were sick. Little Rebekah – now a year old, but still so small – was very sick, and I was immediately reminded of all the struggles we faced with Baby Maria. But Rebekah was already on medication and being carefully monitored by the doctor and by Sister Carmen as well. Baby Moses, who was the first Tarahumara baby (in this group) to be born in a hospital, was having a terrible time teething and could not eat. In addition, Sister Catalina was having a real struggle with her arthritis and was unable to get up. “Can you do something for me?” she asked. And Cidilo, Brother Pedro’s son, had a very high fever and needed more medicine. It can be overwhelming, because its not just one person’s needs to be checked on, but 10 families.

In the afternoon, Robyn and I taught the children a new song – in Spanish, and complete with hand motions – to sing the next day in church. They loved it, and learned very quickly, but it proved to be a little more difficult to sing it in church than we had anticipated. The guitarists (who insisted on accompanying us) only knew one



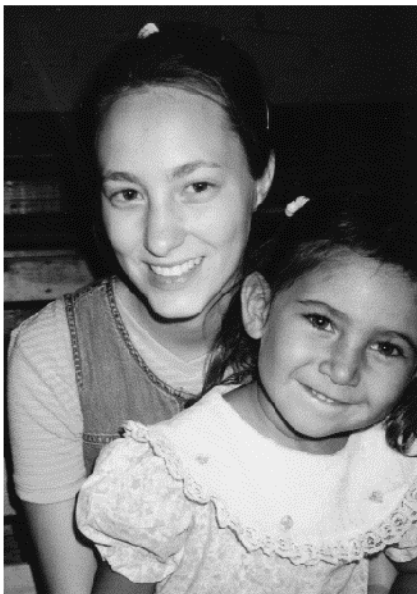
rhythm, and unfortunately it didn’t match our song! That morning there were several other specials as well, including one with a group of sisters. To the natural ear, their singing would probably not be termed lovely, but to me it is, because it makes a joyful noise unto the Lord. I was moved to tears to see

Sister Henriqueta standing with other sisters, but so overcome with emotion as she praised the Lord that she was hardly able to sing. The girls and I were very impressed with one of the deacon brothers, who stood at the front of the church the entire service, watching for mischief amongst the children, and was not in the least bit hesitant to carry out his duties.

Each month, Believers International sends fund to Brother Noah and he purchases staples, such as rice, garbanzoes, beans, and corn for tortillas, for the Indians. That way we are able to know that no one will be going hungry, even when there is no work to be found. But on Tuesday, we decided to make a major grocery-shopping trip to buy some fresh produce and special treats for all 10 families. We each had a list of items, and when we finished and headed for the check-out, we were quite a sight. Our carts were piled high with cabbages, potatoes, tomatoes, onions, rice, raisins, beans, canned veggies, soap and lots more. I was a bit worried about getting all the groceries into the van, and it did take some engineering, but we made it. Back at the *ejido*, it took quite a while to get everything divided up and delivered,

Sarah Ingram makes sure everyone gets candy

Erica Reagan and Blanca



but it was a real blessing for us to be able to do it, and the fresh produce was a treat for the saints.

That evening, we drove to Obregon to spend a few hours with the children at the church there. Since we only had this one evening with them, we couldn't do as many of the crafts and games, but everyone still had a great time. Then we were treated to some special singing by the children choir, and a moving solo performance by the pastor's (Brother Ramon Ponce) son. He has an incredible voice for a 10-year-old.

I spent our last two days in Pueblo Mayo talking with each family, just trying to have some relaxing moments with them, instead of being very rushed, as we were when we arrived. Also, we took the time to measure each of the ladies, girls, and young boys, for clothing sizes. In addition, I traced their foot onto a page in my notebook (which they thought was hilarious!). I think the most precious moment occurred when Robyn and I were at

Rufina's house. I reached around to measure her waist, and she thought I was giving her a hug so she just grabbed on to me with a huge grin! I also enjoyed a long chat with Sister Henriqueta. I explained to her that people at home ask me what she and the other Tarahumaras are like. I told her that my reply was that I love them so much that I want to live next to them in Heaven.

By the time we were ready to leave, all the children who had been ill were very much improved. Cidilo was back at school; Rebekah was pulling herself around chairs, trying to walk, and Moses was beginning to eat more. Sister Catalina was able to walk to church again, and was feeling much better. When we made the rounds to say goodbye, Sister Henriqueta gave me a hug and began to cry. Finally she said, "If I don't see you again here, I'll see you when we live next door to one another in Heaven!" □

We're Running Out Of Time!

At this time last year, we were behind schedule in almost every thing we'd planned to do during 1998. So we promised ourselves that 1999 would be the year when we would catch up. In addition to the day-to-day things that simply had to be done, somehow we would find the time to expand our Web site; we would publish at least one *Only Believe* magazine; we would complete the photo album that we've been working on for years...

But try as we might, there just never seemed to be an extra moment to invest in getting caught up. And now it's December 1999, and once again, we've run out of time without accomplishing all that we wished to do this year.

So, we are looking ahead, and making plans for the year 2000, but like you, we are wondering just how much more time can there possibly be remaining to us? And how can we best prioritize the tasks which still need to be accomplished?

This year we decided not to print a calendar of prayers, but instead we would like to share with you this one prayer (below), and a transcript of the message, *The Messiah*. Over the years, many of you have asked for, and received from us transcripts of messages that are either out of print, or that have never yet been printed (a service we would like to expand in the new year). The booklets we've sent you in the past have been without covers, but recently we decided to design a special cover utilizing some of our favorite photos, and colors.

The photo at the top of the cover-page, on the left, was taken at the Totten's Ford baptismal service in 1941. Below it is a photo from a prayer line in Zion Illinois on March 12, 1949, taken as Brother Branham prayed for a veteran who had lost his hearing in the war.

The photo of the Pillar of Fire, taken in Houston Texas in January of 1950, was also our inspiration for the color of the cover.

Using children's crayons, Brother Branham would often draw this combination of green, yellow, and gold - a color which he called "amber" - to represent the color of His Presence.

Like our brothers in Christ who labor in the pulpits and on the mission fields of the world, we seek the leadership of the Holy Spirit every day for our lives and for our work. Our prayer is that the year 2000 will be a decisive one. May each effort that is being made to spread this Gospel of the end time - every worker in the field, every library, print shop, recording studio, distribution center - be granted one of the 'double portions' that the prophet asked for in his prayer, that it may be poured out upon all the work around the world that is going forth in His Name.

God bless you.

George and Rebekah Smith

We ask today, in the Name of the Lord Jesus, Father dear, that you'll receive our thanksgiving in our hearts, as Thou art always gathered in your sanctuary to hear the praises of your children. And we're thankful today for all the blessings, for the health and the going on of the Church, and the work all around the world. We're so grateful for it. And, Father, we pray that you'll continue, and not only continue, but will pour double portions upon the work everywhere, for we believe we're running out of time. All things are pointing at the end. Just when, we know not, but we wish to be prepared, as ordained by our Lord Jesus for us to do so.

The Ark, 55-0522

All of this is good news for the Bride. As Castro slowly releases his stranglehold on Cuba, religious materials are gradually being allowed to legally enter the country. What was once a nearly insurmountable wall has, in places, begun to reach eye level. I couldn't wait any longer to take a look for myself.

HAVANA As soon as we exited the security gate, a man approached us with a smile on his face. (I will only be using first names in this report, and the only city I'll mention by name will be Havana) "Are you George?" he asked. He was Brother Vladimir, the pastor of the church in Havana, and he was to be our guide for the entire weeklong visit.

Our first experience with Cuban protocol occurred just a short time later, when we tried to check into a reasonably priced hotel in downtown Havana. We were told that as tourists we must stay only in tourist areas, where the prices are higher and security is very strict. We were also told that no one that is not a guest could even visit us in the hotel (and that included Brother Vladimir). In Cuba's 'tourist apartheid' system, the best food and hotels are off limits to the average Cubans, and are reserved instead for dollar-paying customers (mostly Canadians and Europeans).

US dollars, which have been legal in Cuba since 1993, now divide the country into two societies: One with dollars, and one without. For instance, Brother Vladimir has a good job as a carpenter for the state (officially everyone in Cuba is employed.) He earns 162 pesos a month, which translates to \$8.70 US. With no dollars to spend at the well-stocked dollars-only store, he will use his ration book and buy, with pesos, what is available from the government-operated store.

The ration book allows each person to purchase a single roll (the size of a hamburger bun) a day. In addition, each month, one can buy six pounds of rice, five pounds of sugar, three pounds of beans, 12 eggs, ½ pound of lard, a few ounces each of butter and coffee, matches, and a bar of soap. For the very young, there is milk. For those over 55, there are cigarettes.

Meat, fruit and vegetables are abundant in the markets, where farmers from the countryside are allowed to sell any produce that does not go to fill their state quotas. But these fresh foods are very expensive, and can be bought only by those who have dollars to spend – dollars sent from relatives in the US. It is estimated that more than \$800 million dollars are sent to Cuba each year from family members living in abroad.

Those who have no access to dollars have to hustle if they want to eat, especially in the cities. Families are forced to find ways to supplement their incomes.

Brother Vladimir owns a small motorcycle, and the next morning (Sunday) we followed him in our rental car through the side streets of Havana to the neighborhood where he lives. I was surprised by the lack of color, the decaying buildings, and the smell of mildew that seemed to be everywhere, once we were away from the downtown area. There wasn't much in the way of traffic, mostly aging automobiles from the 50s that appeared to be very well cared for.

There were 19 people gathered in Brother Vladimir and Sister Laura's tiny (7 foot x 12 foot) living room for service. Sister Laura, a very loving and frugal sister, is of Czechoslovakian descent. I saw her give another sister five hairpins, items that were both given and received as though they were gold coins. During the service, everyone listened with absolute attention to every word. Afterwards there was singing and prayer, followed by a time for questions. There was nothing frivolous in their questioning, most had to do with receiving the Holy Ghost. It was evident that they had been studying the Message materials that they have been receiving.

The first small package of Message that books arrived in Cuba nearly four years ago were sent by a Canadian brother who had visited Cuba on business, and there he'd made contact with a local Pentecostal man. When he returned home, he prepared a box of Spanish material for his newly found friend, but the box was detained in Cuban customs, and the man never received it. Several months passed, and one day a worker in the customs office saw the box, which was in a pile of confiscated materials that were scheduled to be burned. But instead of burning it, he took it and offered it to a friend of his who was a Christian. That friend wrote to ask for more, and from there a work was started that has spread from one end of the island to the other.

THE ISLAND About one hundred baptized believers live in Cuba, and in the next five days we would travel more than 2,000 kilometers (1,250 miles), and meet nearly every one of them. When we left Havana with Brother Vladimir on Monday morning, we traveled on a deteriorating road that is grandly called the 8-lane, but very quickly it became a 6-lane, and then a 2-lane. Most of the traffic in the countryside is of the horse-drawn variety or bicycles. One afternoon we were actually run off the road by a horse and wagon when the driver decided to turn left, just as I started to pass him!

Away from the cities, where there is not as much close control, we were able to stay with the believers in their homes. But when we arrived at one of our stops, we needed to get a hotel room for the night. The blatant discrimination was almost more than I could stand, but in the end we were forced to take Brother Vladimir to another hotel that was for Cubans only. Sometimes it was hard not to make a scene.

The most important thing was that in each place I was encouraged to see a deep love for the Word, and a thirst for more of the things of God among the people. It is still not easy to get books into the country, even though some restrictions have been eased a bit in recent months. But it is very hard to send tapes to Cuba. Most of the tapes that are there now have been delivered by hand, and even then there are few who can afford the cost of a tape recorder. We are making tapes and recorders a high priority on the list of needs we found in Cuba.

As we traveled across the island, when it was possible I would stop at a dollars-only store and buy a few items for the local congregation – food, household items, and even bicycle tires. And at each place, the people were so appreciative that it helped me to understand how much of a physical struggle it is for them to just survive in Cuba right now. At one stop, the pastor, Brother Victor, and I went to the nearest town to buy groceries. Among our purchases I remember there being some cheddar cheese, several two-liter bottles of sodas (no brands I could recognize), and a small tray of quince tarts. That evening as Brother Victor's wife, Sister Yusilema, was clearing the table she said, "The governor did not eat as well as we did tonight." Her statement amazed me, considering the simplicity of our meal.

At our last stop, on the southern tip of the island, there are about 30 believers, the largest single congregation in Cuba. Many of these people walk for an hour and a half in each direction to come to service. The pastor, Brother Ramiro, is a young man of 25, and the people gather for church on the back porch of his home. The day we were there was also his little boy's birthday – he was two years old – and to celebrate both his birthday and our visit, the brother had butchered a small goat and a small pig to feed everyone.

While we were waiting for supper to be prepared, and for everyone to arrive, Brother Ramiro, Brother Roberto, and myself sat outside talking. I soon learned that among the 30 believers, no one had a tape recorder. The pastor had several tapes, but his recorder had broken nearly a year ago, and there was no way to repair it. Since supper was still a long ways off, the three of us got in the rental car and drove to the nearest dollars-only store, which was 55 kilometers away. Brother Ramiro said he had seen this store, but since he didn't have any dollars, he never went in and had no idea what all was in there.

I'll never forget the look on his face when we entered the door. He was so shocked at the sight of so much merchandise that he could only wander around, not even daring to touch anything. I was able to buy him a nice recorder, and then we added some food items (including some bags of pasta). Earlier that morning, when I went to take a shower at his house, I had been given a small scrap of what appeared to be polyester knit fabric to use as a towel. So when I saw a shelf of brightly colored terrycloth towels as we were checking out, I couldn't resist buying several of them as well.

Shortly after we arrived back at the house, and all the new items had been displayed and made over by everyone, I was passing by a doorway and observed a scene that I know I'll never forget. Brother Ramiro and his wife had taken the box that the recorder came in, filled it with a present for the little boy, and had wrapped it with some paper. When he opened the box, they clapped and exclaimed over how wonderful it was that he had received a birthday present, a bag of pasta. He was thrilled, and there were smiles all around, but I wish I had thought to buy him something more appropriate when we were at the store.

Later that evening, when the service began, I noticed that one of the towels had been draped over the little stand that was being used as a pulpit, as though it were a piece of fine needlework.

There is much that needs to be done in Cuba, and this spring I am planning on returning to spend more time with the saints there. As always, our goal is not only to help them with a few material things, but to bring to them the pure Word of God in their language. We are thankful that small packages of printed material are being shipped with success into the country on a regular basis, and we are believing the Lord will make a way for us to place into their hands all the tapes and films that they need as well.

Keep Cuba in your prayers.

1. *Perseverance* 62-0218.
2. *Abraham And His Seed After Him* 61-0423.

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