

St. Vincent Update

January 1983

Greetings From St. Vincent,

I find it difficult to believe that we have been here for more than a month! By the time you read this we will have been away from the states three months. The time seems to pass so quickly when looking back. And so slowly, when we look forward to being back with you. We do miss each and every one of you and look forward to our reunion next Christmas or at some other time in the future..... Speaking of Christmas (and the Holiday Season in general), both Debbie and I had a joyous holiday even though we were a long way from our families and had a new environment to deal with. We spent Christmas Eve with the Peace Corps crowd and an international gathering of friends. We went to midnight mass at the Anglican church and visited with some new found friends afterwards. We got to bed at 3am! We were up early to cook our first Christmas meal which consisted of; Duck, mashed potatoes, stuffing, corn, fresh baked rolls (mine), gravy, apple pie and some wine. It was an all day project that kept us busy and occupied so that we had little time to think about how much we missed everyone. With carols (both traditional and caribbean) blaring over the radio. Those done by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir were particularly emotion-tugging but the day, though at times tearful, was for the most part a joyful and rewarding ~~day~~. We realized that it would be one of the few Christmas's we would spend alone and we made the most of it.

New Years Eve (Old Years Night) was spent again at a PCV's home at a party after which we went to watch a steel band competition at the local 'stadium'. Again it was a quiet, different, type of celebration, but we enjoyed it knowing that we would have few other holidays alone.

Our last "Xerogram" gave just the basics of our life here. I still could not tell you much more about the island. Deb and I tried to go to Granada last weekend so we could begin seeing more of the EC and of the Grenadines (which are a part of St. Vincent). Unfortunately, the trip was cancelled at the VERY last minute due to lack of participation. These "excursions" are scheduled from time to time for various reasons, so we still have a chance to see the islands near to us by boat. Having never been on the ocean in any type of boat, perhaps its better that the 10 hour trip to Granada was canceled. Perhaps we ought to try the 1 hour trip to Bequia first.... So, I can't add much info to the "basics" you received in our last letter. However I can give you some more info on what it is like to live here in the EC and specifically in St. Vincent Lifestyle....

Living in the EC means s l o w i n g d o w n. A lot of the fast pace we experienced during the X-mas season here has now been replaced with a much more mellow attitude. That attitude extends both in being served and in serving others. Don't count on anyone to ask you if you need help in finding something. Don't count on anyone opening their shop on time or keeping to their hours. Employees generally show up late and leave early. As much to get to shops before they close, as out of habit and work ethic. The amazing thing to me is that all stores and government offices are open at the same time and close at the same time. So if you are a gov't worker and need to get shopping done, you HAVE to leave early. If you are a shop keeper and need to get to a gov't office you have to close early to get there. The logical conclusion will be that hours will become shorter and shorter as both public and private employees attempt to utilize each other's increasingly scarce services,

Our jobs....

I am working for the St. Vincent public service. More specifically, I work for the Ministry of Finance. I will be developing job descriptions for all gov't employees as well as developing a skills bank (Human Resource Inventory) for those same employees. My hours, like those of most public employees are from 8am to 4pm with a 1 hour break for lunch at noon. Yes, I work 35 hours a week! Just like the other folks here....

Debbie has been working as "Physiotherapist" for St. Vincent General Hospital. (whoops... that's Kingstown General Hospital) She's the only Physical Therapist in the country and has been VERY busy since the first day here. In addition to her regular duties she is also training an aide. It seems to me, from her stories, that the hospital is the best indication that we are, indeed in a 'third world' country. The hospital is currently undergoing a complete renovation and yet the medical care will not improve much. That's because the level of medical care is not set by the building but by the philosophy and staff practices. Even though an Army MASH unit may not have perfect structure with which to work, the quality of the staff and techniques used, insure quality care. In St. Vincent, there is an acute, no chronic, shortage of trained medical personnel and medical supplies. Deb wishes she could just get some pillows to make her patients more comfortable. But even more alarming is the value they place on a human life. Many Vincentians I've talked to have said that life is "cheap" here in St. Vincent. Their attitudes toward the terminally ill, aged, handicapped and others, all reflect this lack of value on life. So medical care is administered according to that philosophy. The painstaking detail we take in medicine is ~~really~~ ^{really} a routine mechanical chore here. With no screens on the windows, flies congregate on open sores or soaked dressings. Ants will climb I.V. stands and swarm around needles sights to get at the sugars in the Dextrose solutions. Patients, especially those who are bed-ridden or unable to move, develop open bed sores. It's not that training has overlooked these details but rather that the philosophy of saving any human life and administering medically to anyone who is in need, is not held here to the extent that it is in the United States. If you view a human life as cheap, or even having a fixed tangible value, you will only give care up to the point where it no longer is "worth it" to continue. If you view life as cheap, you give cheap care. Until that philosophy is changed the status of medical care in St. Vincent (no matter how good the facilities are) will remain at 'third world' levels. So much for that sermon.....

I don't wish to give the impression that medical help is unavailable or "midevil" in nature. But it is the one area I know is totally different than in the states. It's the one area I can point to and say "see, I am in a third world country". The other differences are much more subtle....

Our home.....

It is by the sea! Almost on it. If you walk out the back door and walk twenty feet out the back gate, you will almost fall into the ocean (if the tide is in). One of my favorite pastimes is just to sit on the back steps and listen to the sea roll in. It's absolutely the most beautiful sight, and to have it right in our back yard is just too much. The only dark cloud is the 'Disco' next door. The Ambassadors Club is a six night a week hassle. We had hoped that after the holidays were over, the loud music would subside to more reasonable levels but, so far, the indication is that it will persist. The local residents are also annoyed (to say the least) but as yet have done nothing. Deb and I have taken a low-key approach, since we are foreigners, but plan to become more active in the problem solving end once the other residents decide to do some-

thing. I plan to go over just to be neighborly and subtly drop the problem with the noise on their laps. If they respond, great. If they don't, the community as a whole will have to tackle it.

Food....

Not much different than in the states. In fact, most of the food is imported from the states. There is also a great deal of food and supplies imported from other countries. Going to the supermarket is like going into the import foods section in the states. Our butter comes from New Zealand, lunchmeat from Denmark, tea from Great Britain noodles and flour are from local sources. Eggs come from Florida and are 50¢ cheaper than local eggs (\$5.50/doz EC). Milk comes in ½ liter 'boxes' that are long-life processed (they don't need refrigeration) and cost about \$1.25 EC (roughly \$10/gal). Needless to say, I haven't had milk since I've left the states. For the most part the diet is the same. It is possible to rely on starches because the breadfruit, dasheen, eddo, tannia are potato substitutes and can be found in abundance. But, generally a balanced diet is possible without too much trouble and expense. We have eaten chicken pretty steadily since we arrived. It is also imported from the US. At \$2.80/lb it's about the most economical source of protein. Fish is about \$5-6 and is caught locally and sold in open market. Beef is also slaughtered locally and sold fresh (yes, still warm) and is about \$6/lb. Lamb (imported) is about \$8/lb. So on our meager living allowance, we choose chicken. I'm also a bit uncomfortable with the slaughtering and inspecting practices so beef is not a priority. Fish likewise...

BOTTOM LINE...

We like it here. It is very different from the States and no one need fear a change of citizenship on my part. I miss the States very much. I doubt I could permanently give up that lifestyle. But for now, Deb and I are willing to proceed with this adventure and see it through to completion. We miss you. But we would miss also the chance to experience all this beauty and paradox. The cultural experience has already altered my perception of the world so radically that I will never quite be the same. As U.S. citizens you have all been very blessed. Use those many blessings with care. They are very precious to those without....

Hello from the other-half and Belated Holiday Greetings... we hope all your Christmas' were bright and brought much joy. As Pete has relayed, our holiday was happy, passed quickly and was busy. Work is also busy - my fourth week has just passed and I'm slowly learning to deal with some of the hospital happenings. During my first week, I just wanted to ship everyone to the states (especially with the holidays approaching). Now I've just decided to do what I can (which often seems very insignificant) and pray that God will help. He must be helping, patients would never leave that place without His intervention. I'm learning an awful lot about patience & "practicality."

Enough of work... St. Vincent is beautiful and we'd love to share it with anyone who could come. We're now snorkeling and discovering God's wonderful world under the sea. Because of prayer, talking together and the blessing of the sea, we find new strength, hope and even enthusiasm for what we're doing here.

We do think of you all (frequently)... wonder what you're all up to and hope to hear from you. God's blessings.

P.S. Write soon!!

Love,
Deb & Pete