

ALLELUIA...

HE IS
RISEN!

Easter Greetings from St. Vincent!

19 March 1983

May you all share in the Glory of the risen Lord!...I hope this will reach you by Easter though it is still two weeks away. Also a happy and warm spring (starts tomorrow). But fall has come to St. Vincent. We are in the middle of the dry season and, as happens when plants and trees don't get water, the leaves yellow and fall. It's still much greener than the West would be (even in late spring) but I wasn't expecting to see a "Fall" for another year or so. It loses a little in that there is hardly a chill in the air and the colors are not as spectacular as they would be stateside, but it is at least a change of season... Dry season normally produces about 4" rain per month. Last month we had .75" and we had about 1.5" so far this month. So it's a dryer than normal 'dry' season. Speaking of water....

Last weekend we had one of the biggest fires in recent history in Kingstown. It burned one half of an entire city block and did a few million in damage. For all its seriousness, the efforts to fight the blaze reminded us of a 'Keystone Kops' comedy. Kingstown does not have a full time fire brigade and relies upon some policemen with some training to fight the fire with volunteer support. Well, with no one in particular in charge, and no one with special training to fight the fire, there was a lot of action with very little result. The fire fighting equipment has not been adequately maintained so it was difficult to deliver water to the fire. Imagine this scene: Some folks running with fully charged hoses that look like sprinkler systems for the holes in them. Other people running with an empty hose expecting the water to flow, only to find out that the hose was never connected to a hydrant. Some of the hoses were so bad that all the water was lost between hydrant and nozzle. Fortunately, the 'chicken boat' (the boat that brings in frozen chicken from the states) had hoses and pumps and managed to contain the blaze. Otherwise, Deb and I might be out of our usual jobs and currently employed as carpenters rebuilding Kingstown. One immediate result of the fire was that we lost our water for three days. Wash, dishes and showers were all accomplished by carrying water from our landlady's house (she has a storage tank). Running water is an amazing phenomenon! You never realise what a blessing running water is until it is gone. All told, the fire didn't result in any injury or death but the economic impacts will be felt for years. Perhaps a hundred people (or more) unemployed from the loss of jobs and no unemployment comp. system to help them out. The massive loss of capital was covered by insurance but the people were not.

The fire gave the local papers something more to gripe about. Pro and Con both sided against the Gov't (unusual). Most screamed about the lack of trained people and state of the equipment. The leftist used it as an example of a corrupt and selfish Gov't, exploiting the people and leaving them unprotected. I wish you all could see the "Vincentian" I have sent my mom. It's an independant, non-aligned newspaper and can really blow your mind in the diversity of news it prints. A car resting illegally in a field will receive space as well as a conflagration like last weekend. Politics is a volatile area of common interest in the E.C. Every newspaper will do some political grandstanding or condemnation of the other party (of which there are eight in St. Vincent). With elections coming up next year (here. Last elections were in 1979 and, unless Prime Minister Cato calls an early election, next election is in 1984) the talk of politics grows with each passing year. Next year should be "hot, hot, hot" as a local song goes. Politics has also been affecting us more directly in the last two days. One instance was an encounter in the street the other at church.

On the street, we were encountered by a Rasta woman. The Rastas (Rastafarians) are a religious sect (cult) that live simple, vegetarian lifestyles and believe in the return to a 'redeemed' Africa. Anyway, she asked why we were in St. Vincent and we told her about our Peace Corps jobs here, etc. She then went on to complain how so much aid was been spent and how many people were coming to St. V to "help" and yet the poor were still unfed and health care was so bad. At first it sounded like she was blaming us personally. When we explained that we were here to leave skills and talents that would upgrade health care and help the Gov't be more efficient on a continuing basis and that yes, we thought that St. V was being controlled too much by outside agencies rather than the local people, she changed her blaming to the U.S. and U.K. She even through in a parallel to South Africa. Out of her confusion, and I'm still not sure exactly what she was getting at, arose the simple fact that she was angry. I'M not sure whether it was anger at North Americans or whites or what, but her anger was real. I imagine it comes from the frustration of seeing permanent or at least, persistent poverty. But the most striking thing was that she shifted the responsibility for that poverty to us. She also shifted the responsibility for the solution of the problem to us. Though she condemned outsiders meddling in St. V affairs, she accusingly asked us "What are you doing to help?". That is not an unusual view, both condemnation and asking assistance.

In church this morning, we had a Scarboro Priest (Canadian based) that had spent most of his 47 years in the priesthood in south and central american. Rather than give a sermon, he gave an informal talk about politics and poverty in central america. It was a general theme of liberation theology but the condemnation of U.S. policy and the Reagan administration and how it was contributing to the oppression of the poor was a bit too much for me to handle. I'm not all that familiar with the actual situation in El Salvador (I doubt if anyone is), but I know that people are dying needlessly in a war that was initiated by the guerillas. The church indirectly supports the guerillas because they fight for the rights of the poor. Since the U.S. gov't is supporting the gov't of El Salvador, we are necessarily seen as opposing the poor. Not so. Nor is it apparent that the guerillas are fighting for the majority of the Salvadorians. But what has happened is that the responsibility for all the troubles in El Salvador are ~~shifted~~ to the U.S.. presence or so it would seem from the priests view. Again the indigenous population is held blameless while responsibility is shifted to the U.S. But, I wonder, if a Salvadorian or Vincentian were asked where they would like to live, how many would say the U.S., the source of all that oppression of the poor.? The answer, I think, would say more about the truth of these allegations than I could.....

The problem with being here is that I will always be white and a U.S. citizen. I therefore have to carefully weigh the merits of U.S. policy decisions much more carefully than I would stateside (where I can quietly 'hide'). The benefit is that, for the first time in 27 years, I have to try to understand what the U.S. position is. That may be the most difficult task of all. I don't want to over-stress politics here in St. V, but it is a reality and a source of both admiration and animosity in terms of my presence here in St. Vincent.

On to lighter things.....Our garden, which made such a fantastic start, has waned in its phenomenal growth. The spinach refused to grow past an inch in height. The beans and the zucchini contracted some bizarre leaf mold and are still struggling. The ^{corn} will never be as high as an elephants eye. Knees maybe, but at two feet they have put out rapidly maturing miniature ears and will no doubt expire within the month. But, the lettuce and carrots are doing marvelously well. The tomatos and cabbage and cukes are doing fair. The green peppers are growing slow, but steadily. Peas are coming in with mixed results. But it looks as though, we'll be able to have a home-grown salad soon.

The fruit season is also on. The mangoes are just beginning to ripen (I tasted my first last week, VERY good) along with a fruit called a plum rose. Plum rose has a tangy, watery taste that is laced with the fragrance

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and taste of a rose. Its a peculiar fruit but like most things here in St. Vincent, once you try them, you like it. The biggest problem is that ripe fruit brings in the local children to climb in the trees. Now, there is plenty of fruit to go around, but I'd like to know when someone is in my yard. I also feel that the children should learn to respect another persons property as well as learn courtesy in asking before taking. My frequent talks with the neighborhood children have produced limited results. THE other problem is that our garden is accessible if they come into the yard. They may leave with some 'itels' (vegetables) as well as fruit. But, there is nothin to feef yet.

Health-wise its been a mixed month. Both Deb and I had the extreme displeasure to contract Denge Fever. Its also known as break-bone fever. The only way to describe it is to take the extreme body aches of the most violent flu. Add to it a temperature in excess of 103. Top it off with the most brain-busting migraine headache and you have something like Denge. As it turns out, I also had it way back in December but didn't have a lab for it. Its a mosquito-borne disease for which there is no cure but aspirin or pain-killers in severe cases and bed-rest. There are different forms of Denge, some of which are fatal. But only the non-fatal type is in St. V. Its like the flu in that it can be deadly if your resistance is weak but again, no one has died from Denge in St. Vincent. I won't miss it when we repatriate next year.....

We have been trying to be active, physically. Two weeks ago we went to Autly (or Ottley; I've seen it spelled both ways) Hall which is an abandoned farm with a beautiful beach just over a 500 ft hill next to us. Its a nice walk that is rewarded with a cool dip in the ocean. In addition, there is a sunken ship there to explore along with some of the best coral reefs around. It also has thousands of sand dollars that litter the bottom. We are collecting as many as we can carry each time. They will make nice gifts. Outside of that, we haven't been spending as much time in the water as we did when we first came. Either we have become used to the climate, take the nearness to the sea for granted, or have lost the landlubber fascination we first had. We will, no doubt, retreat to the sea when temperatures climb in august...

The usually reliable mail threw us a couple of curves. We had two letters (from mom's) arrive some two months after they were mailed. A week later we got two letters that had been sent to Jamaica in Nov., were sent back to Wash, D.C. then sent here. Needless to say, our confidence which was tenuous at best, has now evaporated. We want to thank you all for your letters we've received over the past month. Each and every one is greatly appreciated and, if you haven't received a reply, be patient. It may be in the slow letter file....

Well that's it. Another month of growth and challenge. Another month closer to visiting the states in Dec. Another month in the U.S. Peace Corps as "community development workers". The complexities grow as well as our ties to the folks around us (a mixed blessing but I'll save that until next month). We miss you all. And send our love along. Again, a happy joyous and peaceful Easter to you.

Now I'm always wondering what I might add... Well, about work... It was Christmas for the K.G.H. Physio Dept. this past month for 3 reasons. 1) the U.S.A.I.D. grant shipment (ordered by the previous P.T., P.C.V.) arrived, 2) Mom Hein sent some paraffin wax for a few hand patients I have, and 3) Mom & Dad Helgren sent my box of files (security blanket & as valuable as gold). Everything was so appreciated and I felt especially blessed.

Everytime Pete says "gotta get out another 'mail-mailing'", it's hard for me to believe another month has passed. Our time here is passing quickly.

I'll close with wishing you all a blessed Easter in we all have new hope and are called to rejoice in all circumstances because Christ has lived, Christ died, and Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Love,
Debbie & 