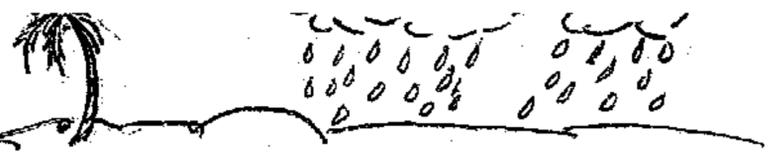


St Vincent Update



Greetings from St Vincent!,

5 June 1983

Perhaps, a happy fourth of July? Its been nearly two months now since we've last written a newsletter. Its not because we have been too busy. Nor has it been due to a lack of newsy things happening. Its just because we simply planned for ten letters in our first year and have to skip a month now and again in order for ten letters to span twelve months. Fact is, we gave our faithful postmasters (Mom's) only ten pre-addressed lables so we have to stretch out our mailings. In retrospect, 'sitting out' May has worked well. Writing now puts us at the exact mid-point of our first year in St. Vincent (Amazing!). We are seven and one-half months down the road from stepping off the plane in Jamaica. So, being at such a crossroad, we are going to step back and take a look at the learnings, hassles and happiness that have taken place over the past six months. But first, we'll bring you up to date on our 'nunnings' over the past two months.....

After five minutes of debate, Deb and I can't really think of anything terribly exciting that has happened. At least between mid-April and mid-May. We had hoped to go sailing but this will hopefully take place on the 16th or 17th of this month (5 days of island-hopping). Actually, April was a difficult month for me emotionally and spiritually. So, I guess I have effectively blocked out much of the month (but Deb agrees that nothing much happened). May was a different story. I was back in a middle management training program with the St. Vincent public service employees. I enjoy it because it relieves me of the monotony of four walls and not much to do. It also gave me the chance to get to know the folks in the gov't service a little bit better. So that filled much of my time. Deb has been experiencing a constantly increasing workload due to the super-human efforts of the British Orthopaedics doctor. The man is a workaholic and I'm getting ready to complain to him about keepin my wife from home. But he also has useful 'connections' and has gotten Deb a transformer for her ultrasound machine and a large glass jar to make a paraffin bath. She really puts in a more than full day which makes me a bit jealous. They could really use another physio here but a \$9800 a year (E.C.-U.S.=\$3500) salary isn't really a big inducement to migrate here & local folks who receive training tend to stay stateside to earn \$18,000. At that salary you might as well be a volunteer. Actually, as a PCV Deb earns about the same. Still another pair of skilled hands would come in handy. Any takers out there??

My job, as unpredictable as usual, has taken another abrupt turn. My boss will be transferred to another gov't post in another month or so which means that I might be 'out of a job' in that it was he who developed the specifics on my assignment. I should have been working with the personnel dept. so that a change in staffing wouldn't have affected me so much, but instead I have been working through my boss. Now just about anything can happen and I have been busy looking around for other opportunities within and outside the gov't service. One possibility is that I might do some training (teaching) at the Univ. of the West Indies extension here in St. Vincent. I may also assist in a skills training program administered by the Christian Broth-

ers. Again, these are only possibilities for increasing my workload significantly. In the mean time, I'm conducting a manpower survey for the Canadian International Development Agency. It should be complete by the end of the month. (You'd think the US gov't would be able to find me some work to do) I have gone from idealism to realism in terms of what I hope to accomplish in the St. Vincent Public Service. I just hope to maintain my sanity. It is obvious to me that to expect much change in 'The System' is a bit unrealistic. What I will settle for, greatfully, is to see some growth in wisdom and maturity in me and hope that that process produces some positive change in St. Vincent.

And talk of change brings up our next subject. How has the last six months changed us? What have we learned and what has been the cost?.... For me, the worst has been homesickness and the despair that can bring. Homesickness has been at the root of most of my adjustment problems. As I thought about it, I realised that I have never been away from my parents and family for more than two months (and that is probably stretching it!). I guess it would have been better if I had gotten that over with during my college days (words of wisdom for future children). Anyway the nagging melancholia of homesickness has been the primary source of my dissatisfaction with living here. It tends to be just a general 'bleah' feeling. That seems to be fading, much to my delight. Its been replaced with a rather guarded 'informed' pessimism. Not such that undermines my ability to find some good in every small step forward. The one thing I have tried to develop is ~~that~~ ability to see something positive in every situation. The reason for that is complex and lengthy.

In our last newsletter, I mentioned how I felt that we must share in Christ's suffering when we serve Him. And since we are called to serve, we are, in essence, called to suffer by Him. We got a lot of 'hot' responses to that particular statement. The objection was to our statement that Christ calls us to suffer. I looked up some scriptural reference (I. Peter, most notably) and I still think that I am within general Christian doctrine when I say we are called to suffer. What I failed to do was go far enough. That is, I left out the 'how to' part. And that is the crux of the matter. We are called to suffer joyously (in the most Christian and, outwardly, most paradoxical sense). Somehow, we are to find strength in our faith to be joyful in our trials and tribulations. That is no small task, but the burden is lifted by Christ. How does that find a place within our experience here? As I said before, looking for the positives and letting the negatives go by (else be overwhelmed by them, as I was being). Seems rather simple or perhaps, obvious? Well, not seeing the forest for the trees is a favourite pastime of mine. Also, there are so many different facets of our life that are different, that trying to accommodate them all is quite a task. Some differences I've noticed about my behaviour or routines--I've slowed down and tend to take things less seriously. Lack of Punctuality or missed appointments hardly fazes me. I'm more conscious of the World and how politics seems to colour everything. Believe it or not, the world does not revolve around the US. Nor should it. There are some very healthy, if strained, interrelationships between nations out there. I'M more conscious of my links with the poor of the world. They are, of course, easier to forget back home. And the relationship between myself and the poor in, say, Africa is more difficult to see. But here it becomes clearer. My inaction at home does oppress the poor. The U.S. gov't is imperialist in some of its foreign doings. But I can see why that is. I can see more than just my own backyard and though the sight is not always pretty, at least I've gained some perspective.

Day to day ~~we~~ spend more time doing even simple things. Wash by hand is a weekend project. Trying to get them dry during the rainy season takes the rest of the week. Shopping is a combination of persistence and luck. I usually have to go to at least two stores and the produce market during the week in order to buy what I want. The market control system is no help either. They recently banned the importation of white (processed) sugar to help boost sales of the local raw (brown) sugar which has been rumoured to cause diarr~~hea~~ and have rust in it (we've not had trouble with it, but it is dirty)

Imported → Onions are banned (but local ones are OK). With such 'stability' people tend to hoard things alot. The bottom line is that the simplest things take a long time to complete. You do learn patience here or you go crazy!

As for the Vincentian culture. Well, I have to admit that some things remain enigmatic to me. But the basics are there. The knowledge of good and evil. I thought that sensitivity to anothers feelings was a 'universal standard' but some dimensions of that seem to be missing here. There is a lack of respect and caring about other human beings here but I haven't been able to discover the roots of that. There is dispair here and pessimism about the future here in St. Vincent though many folks hope for a better life by emigratingg to the US. If I'd like to adopt any of the West Indian lifestyle it would be the slower paced, take it as it comes sort of attitude. In spite of that, high blood pressure is endemic here. Perhaps, 'slowing down' is a responce to that. In all, I would like to live here but not forever....

In a word we are 'hopeful'. We have been pulled and stretched a bit. We've confronted customs and mores that at time appall us. The heat, humidity, mosquitos, dogs and assorted other 'undesirables' that afflict us from time to time get tedious and physically take their toll. But we have learned so much and we look forward to learning more. It will certainly be something to talk about to the grandchildren!....

Well, enough from me. Thanks for all your letters and the little pieces of home they bring to us.

June 12 - And continuing, a week later. Deb informed me that I left out a couple of experiences that should have been included. But, before that, this delay in mailing has given me an idea. I think we will try a weekly play by play next letter. I do tend to forget things and by writing segments of this newsletter each week, I'll keep up to date as well as get it out on time (hopefully). As it is, it will be the Fourth before you receive this!!

Most recent 'history': I had Denge fever on monday so this makes my third time around with it. We also got the first of our cabbages stolen (rats!). No, rats did not steal them. We don't know who took them but it must've been someone who knows our daily routine because they were stolen during the day. The most vexing part is that somebody knows who took them (nothing in this neighborhood is done secretly). But no one is telling. But it gives me a chance to show a littlee Christian charity and share my produce. We knew it would happen, sooner or later but I guess we were lulled into a false sense of security. But, a french agronomist we know did say they were the best looking cabbages he had seen on the island. Words of doom.....

On to more encouraging things... one of the things we left out in our last letter was our trip to Mustique. We went aboard the "Grenadine Star" (an old WW II SST, like those boats in John Wayne movies that hit the beach and the front of the boat falls to become the ramp..). It was a long trip because we went to

Bequia first. It was a cloudy, rainy day so it wasn't the best boating weather. But, Mustique is beautiful!! Its kind of like a huge resort island. In fact the whole island is owned by a corporation (or has formed a corporation of itself) and it is strictly a destination tourist island. Kind of like living on a giant-sized golf course in the middle of the Caribbean. Each home was huge and meticulously maintained. Something out of paradise 'Homes and Gardens'. It really was something.. Oh, Mick Jagger has a house there as well as Princess Margaret. Remember the scandal with Prince Andrew sneaking away with the 'model' to a Caribbean hideaway? Yep, happened right in Mustique. Well enough of travel and 'National Enquirer' news... something a bit closer to home... We had the 'Welcome to St. Vincent' party for the newest group of PCV's just in from training in Jamaica. Hooray, were no longer the 'rookies' here!! Kind of put things into a different perspective. People were asking us about St. Vincent. An amazing change of roles (and a welcome one!). Anyway, we managed to pack about 60 people into this humble and small abode (as the rains poured buckets outside). About 50 folks were old and new Peace Corps. The others were a collection of British VSO's (Volunteer Service Overseas), Canadian 'Crossroaders', French conscientious objectors (they can choose to serve overseas if they don't want or will not join in France's conscription program) and some folks from U.S.A.I.D. (U.S. Agency for International Development). So it was a very international mix and a very interesting time. The only 'downer' was that this is the fly season (because of all the ~~rotting~~^{fruit} on the ground) and the little beggars nearly flew off with the food (we had to 'fumigate' the place afterwards, fun!!). Mainly, we grow more and more 'worldly' in the understanding of ourselves and of other nationalities. We mature as our exposure to the 'real' world increases.. NOW a word or two from Debbie!

As this letter has gotten rather long, I won't add too much (I hope). I'll just say that I'm busy at work, and I'm feeling more and more comfortable all the time. My assistant, Judith, is showing a little more interest in physiotherapy, and we're becoming better friends. Her increased interest in physio is timely in that the orthopedic doctor keeps finding more and more work for us. Though I'm enjoying work more, I'm ready for a short vacation.

Pete mentioned the island of Mustique... such a striking difference between what we saw there and what we see at and around Kingstown General Hospital... the very, very rich vs. the very, very poor. In the EC, this contrast prevails and disheartens... It always makes me think of home and the injustices that must exist but aren't so easily seen.

Better sign off...

We wish you all peace. God's blessings!

Love,
Debbie 

