

Christmas, 1967

Dear Friends,

It has been some time since most of you have heard from us, and I am sure that it seems that we have gone off in orbit somewhere, never to return. Actually we are very much alive, although it seems to me that Ralph is orbiting at least half of the time. While we have been home on furlough since August of last year, Ralph has been out of the country more than three months of that time, checking on things in Guatemala (there were no replacements for us), doing work for the Latin American Association of Theological Schools, Northern Region, of which he is the executive secretary, or running workshops and spreading the gospel of extension seminary education overseas. After returning Christmas eve, he wings off again for Urbana on the 27th, returns for a few days, then is off again toward the end of January for an Association meeting in Cuernavaca, Mexico. He has said that he has been in more foreign countries while on furlough than in his ten years overseas.

Many have asked us about our present status and our future. At the moment we are under the employ of the COEMAR (the Presbyterian Board of Missions) on home assignment for Ralph to teach in the School of World Missions with Dr. Donald McGavran here at Fuller Theological Seminary in our hometown of Pasadena, California. This has been quite an exciting assignment because of the studies of the advance of Christianity being done by missionary-students on furlough here. Mission strategy and customs are all under examination. New ideas abound. Enthusiasm is high. Ralph has often said that to teach a rote course in a typical institution would for him be a dismaying experience. I have heard no such complaints from him this year. The students in themselves are a challenge...fifty returned missionaries with years of experience behind them, all of them ready for a critical reappraisal of the work they are doing and have done overseas.

I have also been busy. It keeps me jumping just to keep up with Ralph, (and I do try to do that, helping him with secretarial work, bibliographies, articles, research for his classes, etc.) I have completed my studies for an elementary teacher's credential to be added to my R.N. and B.S. California requires now that the student teacher not only have a number of hours of curriculum and methods courses, but also a total of 32 units beyond the bachelor's degree. Included for an elementary credential is a course in modern math, which was by far the hardest course of all for me. The glory of missionary work is that husband and wife can work together on the same job and share their visions. It is a real tragedy how U.S. husbands and wives grow further and further apart because of the way their jobs are structured.

The family is all well. Beth is now a teenager, with all that that implies. Daddy is her idol, and mother...? She is very busy keeping near the top of the accelerated 8th grade class, tutoring a Spanish-American child, serving as chairman of the Jr. Hi. missions committee at church, taking piano lessons and accompanying another child in voice lessons. Over Christmas holidays she plans to read five science books for her second semester project in science. (I have my doubts!) Becky is becoming a self-confident 7th grader, also in an accelerated class. She is the cook of the family, even preparing entire meals for guests if necessary. She misses the small-school environment of Guatemala, but is gaining new and important skills in making friends. Linda at 10 is also pushing toward the teens. She is quite poised and has the reputation of being the daughter that is never home. Actually she is out only for pioneer girl activities, but during certain months these are numerous. She passed the fish swimming class at the YMCA twice, but dreads the workouts of flying fish. Her favorite subject in school is social studies. I wonder why? Tricia is a very loquacious 8-year-old. She is a member of the Brownies, and is suddenly developing into a very good reader. We hope to cure her of her TV addiction in the near future.

Now we feel we owe to those of you who have the patience to read on a report of the last five years in Guatemala. The major accomplishments of this term were: 1) the establishment of a government-authorized adult-education program in primary studies, starting with five students six years ago, and now numbering over 1000, and cooperating with 10 different missions; 2) in cooperation with the seminary faculty in Guatemala, the inauguration of a new extension-type seminary program which sends the teacher to the student in his locale rather than the student to the teacher. (This program is now spreading throughout Latin America and is being studied in parts of the Far East and in Africa.); 3) a vocational training program for ministerial students to prepare them for a "tent-making ministry" following the example of the Apostle Paul. (This program has suffered from our absence more than any other, and yet could easily be administrated by a retired lay-businessman); 4) the establishment of a junior high school in our town, run independently of the mission and staffed by protestant teachers, and organized thus at the request of the Catholic fathers in the town. Ralph was also co-pastor of the local Spanish-Indian church. His efforts were mainly spent however in organizing, coordinating, and administrating these new programs. I tried to be a good right-hand man, teaching, writing textbooks, grading papers, etc. Every summer we enjoyed the many visitors who came to see or to help with the work. The last two literally "raised the roof" to make more space for the volunteer workers which we hope will come over the years.

In all it was a very busy five-year term, but also very exciting. Much more needs to be done. The COEMAR is looking for recruits to help out, and we hope that before another year goes by a new couple will be ready to go. We will be going back temporarily next summer, but will be returning to Fuller next year again.

I'm sorry that Ralph cannot add something to this letter. I'm sure he would like to tell you about the exciting revolutions in Christian Missions around the world, and how today more than ever before it is a thrill to be on the front line of the spread of the gospel. But that will have to wait for another letter.

We do hope that each one of you experience a joyous and meaningful Christmas, with your families where possible, and where not confident that God has his hand on the affairs of man and cares what happens to him. Somehow the message of Christ's coming is just as pertinent and necessary today as it ever was, in the States as much as overseas.

With joy, in His Service,

*Ralph + Roberta*

Ralph, Roberta, Beth, Becky, Linda & Tricia  
Winter

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