

“Etta Projects partners with Bolivian communities to identify, prioritize, and implement sustainable solutions to the health, education, and economic challenges of poverty.”

It has been a long time coming but we are finally producing another newsletter. We have tried to cut back cost, get green and still get you information about the projects you support. Our main communication now is via email or our website and through face book. If you are not hearing from us, we probably do not have your email address. Please make sure we have all your information and if you don't have email then please let us know and we will gladly continue to mail to you. Our new website is wonderful and we post updates on every project almost every month. It is our goal to always keep you informed so you can know the exciting work you are doing in our world. In this summer edition I am giving you one story that really exemplifies ETTA PROJECTS. Thank you for all you do for us. Read Katie Chandler's story and please give if this is the kind of work you can be proud of.

## Poverty in Rural Bolivia...

By Katie Chandler, Projects Director

Each month Etta Projects makes advancements in the communities where we work. This month offered a series of successful teacher and community workshops. While there were a number of progresses made, May was less about *what we do...and more about why we do it*. Behind Etta Projects' passionate beginnings, warm logo and enthusiastic staff is the reality of poverty.

Most of the 25 communities that participate in Etta Projects' Hygiene & Sanitation Project are a few hours from the office in Montero. Despite long, tiresome days we are able to travel to the community, give the workshop and then return home the very same day. Starting in May, however, we began to focus on communities in the Municipality of Santa Rosa. The long commute out to remote villages keeps our staff out in the field for a good chunk of each week without returning to Montero.

I hate to admit this, but when I decided to join the facilitators for three days in Santa Rosa I left the house feeling aggravated that I had forgotten my facial moisturizer, worried that my daughter's father (who has no sense of fashion) was not going to dress Koah in the right clothes for school, and concerned if I had brought enough food and snacks to last the entire trip. I don't consider myself high maintenance; still these are the thoughts that floated through my head as the two facilitators and I made our way out to the campo. Needless to say, the following three days became quite a humbling experience.

The trip seemed to last forever as we drove hundreds of kilometers on bumpy dirt roads, across bridges made of thin branches, around so many curves I was convinced we were driving in circles. It didn't take long for my back to stiffen up from hitting the dips and the bumps. Just when I started feeling sorry for myself, we passed by yet another family walking the 60 kilometer trek to or from the market with their wheel barrow. As I worried about my aching back, I looked in the rearview mirror and could barely make out the figures of the little children bent over, covering their mouths, trying to escape the thick dust left in my tracks. Suddenly I felt foolish for even thinking about a stiff back.

The next three days were filled with countless memories that I vow to keep in the forefront for a lifetime. Long periods in the field are difficult, but they are also advantageous. Our extended stays in these villages give us an insight to a reality that is even worlds away from what life is like in the impoverished city of Montero. We had the unique opportunity to experience what villagers do both early in the morning and after the sun goes down- what music they listen to, what food they eat, where they go to the bathroom, how they pass classes in their tiny one-room school house, how their night sky fills up with the most brilliant explosion of stars.

There were so many small moments that seemed insignificant at the time, but that remain trapped in my mind. Shoes. They say in order to understand another person you need to take a walk in their shoes. I will not forget the little boy with his brand new knockoff converse shoes. He pranced up to our group so proud of his new kicks. As all the other kids goggled over the shoes I noticed that almost everyone else wore the old soles of flip-flops that they kept tied around their feet with plastic or string. As I turned back to the boy with converse, even he protected his new shoes with one foot in a dirty, torn sock and the other in a plastic bag. I thought to myself, “Whatever crazy attire Koah's dad dresses her in will be absolutely okay.”

There were other moments that allowed me to better understand the *conditions of life* in these forgotten villages. At the first workshop I could not believe the people's ages during the introductions. The faces of men and women in their early 20s were filled with wrinkles and age marks. Their feet looked like they carried them through a life time; their hands appeared like they never stopped working. The theme of the week was sanitation. To start the session the facilitators distributed pictures of different images involving defecation and asked people to describe what was happening in the picture. One woman held a picture of boy going to the bathroom in a field and she described it by saying “it's a boy going poop.” The facilitator asked “Where?” The women laughed at the question and responded, “In the bathroom”. In this community a field is a bathroom.

As we talked about their current sanitation situation one woman role-played how to bury excreta with dirt or dried materials to avoid the spread of contamination after defecation in the open air. As she pretended to go to the bathroom, she knelt down swatting flies and looking around her in all directions. I asked if she was checking to see if someone was coming. She giggled and told me she was watching out for snakes. I imagined what it would be like if every single time I had to use the bathroom, I had to think about bugs, insects, bees and venomous snakes. In that moment, sanitation transformed from a health concern into a fight for human dignity.

There were other moments that helped me to understand the *nature of the people* that live in the communities. Food in these villages is a scarcity. The commute to the market is difficult, and at times impossible. One teacher from the city of Santa Cruz that recently accepted a job in one of the villages confided to me, “It's hard to live here. I have my two children with me. When it rains we cannot leave. Families grow rice here so that is accessible, but sometimes we go days even weeks without meat and vegetables.” Despite these conditions it seemed everywhere we went people were inviting us to food. As they handed us plates of chicken soup or rice with eggs and vegetable, they looked embarrassed. “I know this is not what you normally eat, but this is the best that we have here.” I've worked in fundraising for years and I have encountered very, very generous people....but this was a different type of generosity- to have nothing and then to humbly give the little that you do have to a stranger. I was brought to tears as I later unpacked the truck in Montero to find the cans of food I had brought that I previously worried would not be enough.

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- Christmas tree sales begin Thanksgiving Weekend
- Next Auction, May 14th 2011



Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.  
~Dr. Seuss

No one could make a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little. *Edmund Burke*



Penny Nixon-West  
Executive Director

Katie Chandler  
Projects Director



There's another moment that I continue to replay over and over in my mind. In one village, a group of women sat in a group talking together while mindlessly checking for lice in their children's hair. When I pulled up a stool to join the group I heard one woman say, "I just sold my beans for 70 Bs a quintal and now I hear they are being sold in the city for 450 Bs a quintal. I'm so tired of working tirelessly all day long to grow food that doesn't give me the time or the money to feed my own family. With the little money I make from my labor I can barely buy seeds to work next year." I asked her why she is willing to sell at prices so much lower than the market price. She responded, "Seventy Bs is better than nothing, and since there are not a lot of buyers that come through I have to sell for whatever they are willing to pay. I will have nothing if no one else comes and offers me a better price." I imagined these middlemen preying on poor families, charging excessive fees to transport their products simply because the villagers lack the startup resources needed to get products to the market.



I keep going over these memories and hundreds of others from the week. Poverty has a million faces; it looks and feels differently depending on the place and the culture. This is poverty in Eastern rural Bolivia. It is exploitation of rural farmers. It is a community that's only source of water is one shallow, dirty well. It is a world without health centers. It is growing old at a very young age. It is doing your necessities among flies, mosquitoes, and snakes. It is bloody feet because your worn shoes do not stay on. It is worrying about how long you will go without eating if the rain does not stop. It is being removed and feeling helpless in a system that does not listen to your voice.

I know that many times we feel so distant from this type of poverty and seldom do we realize the impact that we really can make. Etta Projects is a link that can connect you to making a difference in these communities. Etta Projects supports communities so that they no longer have to feel helpless and hopeless. We don't name their problems or their solutions; rather we empower people and communities to be leaders in their own process of change. We work to create a common goal among all sectors of the community-men, women, children, teachers, health promoters, and community leaders- so that they can better work together to make a sustainable transformation in their lives and wellbeing. Please consider supporting Etta Projects and becoming an advocate to change poverty in Rural Bolivia.

**Katie's mother penned these thoughts after a visit to our projects.**

**Impressions by Barbara Chandler, the Mom**

*I anxiously await my plane that will whisk me back home where my safe little cocoon awaits me. My world is safely sealed with screens and pest control, hospitals that cure all, insurance policies that fix everything. My imaginary world allows me to slip into my crisp clean sheets at night and sleep like a baby.*

*I made this trip to Bolivia not to serve but to visit my daughter and her family (My daughter, Katie, began working for Etta Projects in March of 2009). The visit included some of the typical events – dinner with friends, shopping and seeing the sights. There were also the atypical events – the request to teach a baking class, joining the group in a visit to a rural community that needed information about water systems, health, and hygiene. Then there were frustrating visits to different departments trying to coordinate projects so that they actually come to fruition.*

*Now I consider myself a good person. I don't walk pass people asking for a hand without dropping them a coin or lifting a load. I write checks of donation to the select organizations I support. But who the hell are these people that live outside their comfort zone and search out those in need? People who look for ways to help so that it is not about them but about empowering the communities of achieve on their own. Pennye Nixon-West is that kind of person. She is a mother as I am a mother, but that is where the similarity ends. When she lost her daughter Etta in a terrible accident here in Bolivia, she did not close a part of her soul and retreat to the safety of her sorrow. She allowed the essence of Etta to grow within her soul. She turned her lost into hope and founded Etta Projects. Fierce and often outrageous she fights for the funding of projects and for the people that have learned t except less then they deserve.*

*I saw the villages that have yet to get a water system. While the people were wonderful, my hygiene and safety alarm went into overdrive. I was doing a count down on how soon we would be able to leave. Then we went to a village where Etta Projects had already successfully brought fresh clean water to each home. The small school had bathrooms as well. My heart celebrated their achievement. It was like a different world. But it didn't just happen. It took education, government support, community involvement, and coordination. And as we all know change always involves stumbling blocks and setbacks. The kind of things that make someone like me throw up their hands and say, "Oh well, I tried." But for Pennye and her crew they persist. Completed water systems that don't work put fire in Pennye's eyes as she asked the company, "Would you accept this in your home because I wouldn't and if it is not good enough for us it is not good enough for anyone. FIX IT!" And they did and now it works. I was brought to a newly formed bakery. Women from a small village wanted something better in their lives. Etta Projects offered small business courses, bakery training, and funding. The women brought commitment and the willingness to work hard. The end result - success. The village has fresh baked breads. The bakery is thriving and a portion of the funding will be repaid in order to help fund new projects down the road.*

*These people and the people they serve touch and inspire me. But can they change me? What makes me the kind of person that sorts through the paper money to get to the coins in my giving while a poor village family with nothing offers us whatever they have in order to honor us as guests? As you read this do you see yourself more like Pennye and her staff or do you see yourself more like me, not ready to leave the cocoon but certainly wanting to do something outside the comfort zone. Search your talents because the need is great. Can you offer educational ideas, money, or fundraising capabilities? Maybe you are feeling adventurous and want to come down and do some hands on support.*

*Etta does sustainable development. They educate, coordinate, and fund projects. They build relationships and offer people that expect nothing, basic things. Things we take for granted - clean water, opportunity to make a living, and understanding of what is needed to sustain a healthy body. Etta Project's resources influence what they are able to offer rural Bolivian communities. People like you and I influence Etta Project's resources.*

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