

Spring break 2002

Clowns visit French Guiana during spring break

Kathryn Phillips
Special to the Pilot

On Saturday, March 2, wearing polka-dotted pants, floppy hats, and suspenders the French Guiana team from Gardner-Webb started our ministry. We piled into a small van, trying for the record of how many clowns can fit into one car.

We started out clowning in the marketplace. We set up on a grassy square in the midst of fruits and vegetables and all sorts of people scurrying to sell their wares or buy the evening's meal.

We made balloon animals for the children, threw balls and danced around. Though most of us did not speak French, smiles and laughter were all the language we needed to reach these kids, show them we cared and make them feel special.

The next day, Judith Hunt

and I joined Chip, our missionary host, in the French church during the morning worship. I recognized many of the songs we sang in French. I greeted the church in French, and Chip translated while I told about God in my life.

During the week, we were to learn that the lives of the people of French Guiana are very hard at times, but God never forsakes His people. He carries them through the harshest storms.

Sunday evening we went to a church in Kourou where we first had fellowship with the older youth and then joined in worship with the whole church. It was great to see the way they worshiped our Lord with such enthusiasm.

The body of Christ may be spread wide, but it's amazing how we can truly come together as one in the spirit of God.

On Monday, we ministered at the A Pou Nou apartment complex. Because of the

strict laws, we were going to just show up, start playing, and see if we could draw a crowd of kids.

When we got there, a short, wrinkled man came up to ask what we were doing. Chip and Gail, the missionaries with us, said later that normally when adults question these things, they tell them to leave. But this man actually helped round up a group of kids for us.

We played kickball and soccer, and there were crafts as well. The man invited Chip and Gail to come back, and even said he wanted to hear more about the story of Jesus. This was a big breakthrough and answer to prayer for the missionaries; it is generally very difficult to be accepted into the apartment complexes.

On Tuesday morning, Karen Burnette, Emily Porter and I had an hour slot on the radio station. We played Christian music, talked about why we were there and read

Scripture.

Tuesday's ministry was in the Rochambeau apartment complex, where we played games, made crafts and sang songs with an ever-growing group of kids.

On Wednesday morning, we hiked through the jungle and even swung on a vine. Later, we distributed Bibles at Mont Lucas and followed up with games, crafts and clowning at an apartment complex across the street.

It was amazing for us to see how something as simple as a balloon, when properly formed, can bring a sparkle to a child's eye and a giggle from her lips where before there was the cold distance of a silent onlooker.

On Thursday, we met with some university students and divided into groups to do door-to-door evangelism, while others did crafts with the kids.

Accompanied by three of these students, I set off in the

rain with a backpack full of Bibles.

At the first house, we met a woman who was a Christian. She invited us in, and we sang, prayed and read Scripture. This was unexpected to me, but it was a neat experience to have that time of worship with the woman and her family.

The thread of God at work, revealing himself and his will to his people, ran throughout our trip to French Guiana. We each took away more than memories and good stories to tell; we were changed by allowing God to use us in such unique ways.

Sometimes miracles find you, but you have to be ready to recognize them. Though this was an awesome experience, the work continues--wherever we may find ourselves. Look for the opportunities waiting in each new day.

GWU students experience life in the Bayou

Summer Hess
Special to the Pilot

Their T-shirts stated their intent.

"From the happening halls of GWU to the vibrant streets of N'awlins, the repeat offenders of 'the real' spent one week immersed together in a beautiful hodge-podge of music, ministry, laughter, bible, and all around tom-foolery."

On March 4, 15 Gardner-Webb students left comfort zones and headed down to New Orleans to see another place of the world—to continue to practice what they had been learning together at The Real, a Bible study held at Christ Covenant Church's building.

The goal of their trip was basically this: to love each other and those they came in contact with. With four different places of opportunity, the students divided up into teams and worked at the following institutions:

Belle Reve—Assisted living housing for HIV-positive people. They organized a food pantry, cleaned out and painted storage and office spaces and renovated a garden for the residents to enjoy.

Project Lazarus—An assisted living home for AIDS symptomatic patients. The team spent time simply visiting with patients and trading little bits of



Photo by Jessica Webb

Junior Michelle Vander Vaart paints a fence at the Covenant House in New Orleans, La. The team worked in different areas of the city with AIDS patients, the homeless and other college students.

their lives through conversation and activities.

Covenant House—A home for runaway teens with a drug rehabilitation program. The team stripped and painted a huge black fence surrounding the property.

Brantley Center—A homeless shelter and food kitchen located in downtown New Orleans. The team served food, and conducted a chapel service.

The rest of their time together con-

sisted of holding nightly Bible studies at a local church and exploring the vibrant, boisterous city. However, just like the dirt and grime that was hidden in the glare of city lights, there were thousands of hurt and dying people hidden by the noise of the crowd. Students who went on the trip said they saw something that woke them up--reminded them of what really matters and why they are alive.

Personally, I was challenged, as

were many others, by having my superficiality stare me right back in the face, to see the lameness with which I so often converse and interact with people.

As I knelt in front of the wheelchair of a woman with AIDS waiting to be taken to the hospital because her kidneys were failing again, there was no room for statements like "Oh, it'll all be ok," or "Tomorrow will be better." There was no denying the fact that this woman was dying.

There was no ignoring Helmut, an old German man who was happier and more full of life than any person I had ever met, even though his body was fighting an incurable disease.

There is no explanation for the way I live, complaining and selfish, oblivious to a world of hurt around me. George Herbert Mead said, "No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves around us." Whether you realize it or not, when people around you are hurting, it is impossible not to feel pain yourself.

Being involved with these opportunities to ease the pain of others through the love of service in visible and invisible ways was the best decision I could have made concerning what to do with my spring break.