

November 18, 1970

## MK's In Peru Desert Find School "Room at the Top"

RICHMOND (BP)--"It was a typical one-room schoolhouse, and it was not unusual for two of the children to get involved with what the third was doing, says Mrs. L. Steve Ditmore, Southern Baptist missionary to Peru.

The "typical" schoolhouse was a rooftop room used to store furniture for missionaries while they were on furlough in the states. The students were the Ditmore children, three missionary kids (MKS) who lived 300 miles from their nearest North American friends. The schoolmarm was a young "missionary journeyman."

Mrs. Ditmore recounted the way the "room at the top" of their home was turned into a one-room schoolhouse as she recalled the perils of trying to educate her children in a city located in the midst of Peru's Sechura Desert.

The school on the roof of their home in Piura, Peru, was the Ditmore family's alternative to using a screened-in porch at the front of the house as a classroom.

"People were coming to the gate constantly, Mrs. Ditmore says. "Whether it was a beggar, salesman, church member or someone looking for the new missionary, it still disturbed the classroom."

Finally, the rooftop storeroom was cleaned out. For about a year the children studied at one end of the room, with furniture stacked at the other end.

The arrival in 1968 of Miss Linda Smith really begins the story of the rooftop school. Mrs. Ditmore calls her "truly an answer to prayer."

Miss Smith, a college graduate, had been commissioned as a "missionary journeyman" by the SBC Foreign Mission Board for two years of service teaching overseas.

"Before my arrival in Piura, the children's mother had been teaching them," Miss Smith says. "This is a hardship on a missionary mother. Trying to play the dual role of mother and teacher is not only exhausting when you have children in three different grades, but also places tight limits on the amount of mission work the mother is able to do."

Elated when their "real teacher" arrived, the children labeled her "teacher," a name that stuck.

"We made our own blackboard with a piece of plywood and blackboard paint," says Miss Smith. "We also had a painted piece of wood for a bulletin board, and a carpenter in our church made us some shelves from wood left over from the missionaries' crates."

Miss Smith feels that the rooftop school was probably as well-equipped as the average stateside classroom with maps, a globe, encyclopedias, flash cards, pencil sharpener and books checked out periodically from a MK library in Lima, Peru.

"I used the Calvert School Home Instruction courses for teaching," Miss Smith says. "Completed by thousands of American children living abroad where there is no American school, this method of study gives MKS credit for their work just as if they were attending school in the states."

Eight tests are taken for each course during the year and sent to the Calvert School in Baltimore, Md., for grading by certified teachers. In this way, Steve, Susan and Shellie were graded along with other children their own age studying the same subjects throughout the world.

During the two years, Miss Smith taught first, third, fourth, fifth sixth and seventh grades.

"As a journeygirl MK teacher, the past two years were a journey from Robinson Crusoe to disjunctive conjunctions, from Nancy Drew mysteries to denominate numbers, and from Mother Goose rhymes to verbal nouns," says Miss Smith.

She lists among her rewards for teaching the "I love you" note written in third grade sincerity and carefully folded in a pink homemade envelope; the thrill of hearing Shellie read her first words; the day Susan danced joyfully in front of the blackboard as she worked her long division, and the call, "Hey, Teacher, I need you!"

School was in session all year except during vacation in January and the meeting of the organization of Southern Baptist missionaries in July. The Ditmore children usually saw their MK friends only twice a year, during these trips.

"A normal school day began at 8 a.m.," says Miss Smith, "and we stopped at noon for lunch, a siesta or a swim in the nearby pool. We began again at 3 p.m. and usually finished our day around five or six.

Miss Smith says that the only two seasons in Piura are "hot and super hot." Since the heat was so intense in the summer months, January through April, she never insisted that the children wear shoes.

"They dressed casually, and sometimes Shellie sneaked to school in her bathing suit," Miss Smith says. "I tried to maintain as much of a normal classroom as is possible in a one-room school, but it was impossible to make the children into stateside pupils in the Sechura Desert."

Recesses, often taken on the roof, involved games of chase and swinging on the clothesline poles. As the children grew older, swimming lessons for Susan and Shellie and tennis lessons for Steve substituted for the physical education courses they were missing.

"Perhaps the biggest advantage to studying at home was that the school could be closed if something more important came along," says Mrs. Ditmore. "For example, Steve traveled some with his dad and learned about pioneer missions firsthand."

Mrs. Ditmore thinks the two most difficult things about school at home are loneliness and lack of competition, although at times the Ditmore children did study with children whose fathers were in Peru on business.

The Ditmores are currently in the states on furlough, and the three children attend regular schools. The oldest child, Steve, is now 14 years old, Susan is 11, and Shellie, 6.

"If all goes as planned we will send our two older children to a boarding school when we go back to Peru," says Mrs. Ditmore. "We look forward to the day when there will be a good English-speaking school in Pirua."

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PHOTO MAILED TO BAPTIST STATE PAPERS

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#### CORRECTION

Please correct figures in vote count reported in Baptist Press story dated 11/13/70 headlined "Virginia Baptists Defeat Efforts To Cut Budget to SBC, University," Change graph 4 of the story to read: "After lengthy debate, the messengers voted 440 to 406, a margin of 34 votes to amend the budget...." Thanks.

--Baptist Press

WASHINGTON (BP)--The District of Columbia Baptist Convention, in its 94th annual session here, received four predominantly black churches into its membership and installed a newly-elected executive secretary.

The addition of the four new churches brings to 63 the number of congregations affiliated with the D. C. Baptist Convention.

James A. Langley, elected earlier by the convention's Executive Board as the chief executive of the state convention, was installed. He succeeded M. Chandler Stith who retired at the end of October.

In other actions the convention adopted resolutions on ecology, drug problems and voting representation for the D. C. delegate to Congress.

A resolution expressing "strong concern and opposition to President Richard Nixon's appointment of Henry Cabot Lodge as "occasional visitor" to the Vatican was defeated by a vote to table the resolution.

R. Stuart Grizzard, pastor of National Baptist Memorial Church was elected president. He succeeded Carl Tiller, a layman, and a former president of the American Baptist Convention.

In the resolution on ecology, the convention pledged to promote environmental protection by supporting programs and legislation to clean up natural resources and to prevent further polluting of the environment.

The ecology measure called for, among other things, establishing a tax structure and zoning regulations to encourage the preservation of open space, stringent standards to minimize contamination of water, and the implementation of ways to circumvent mass use of the internal combustion engine.

In a vote that was unanimous, the convention asked "every member of the churches" to support at least one discipline of environmental protection. Named also in the ecology resolution was a request that the government "broaden and intensify" studies of the effects of population congestion in terms "of noise, confusion and ugliness to the human spirit."

The resolution on drug problems deplored the conditions surrounding the use of drugs and challenged the churches "to be willing to formulate plans and programs that will help to expunge this devastating menace from our social order."

Adopted with no dissenting votes in the resolution on drugs, the convention called upon the churches to be "responsible agents" of reconciliation and grace, and to give "succor and understanding" to victims of drug abuse. It urged the churches to be informed of the causes and effects of drug abuse and "to be institutions of therapy and rehabilitation, physically, mentally and spiritually."

The D. C. Baptist Convention, dually aligned with both the Southern and American Baptist Conventions, adopted a budget of \$596,699. This represents a budget reduction of \$71,015 from the previous year.

The 63 churches of the convention have a membership of some 40,000.

Next year the convention will be held Nov. 12-13 at the Zion Baptist Church here.

RICHMOND (BP)--The Southern Baptist Convention Foreign Mission Board has asked its missionaries in East Pakistan to advise the board whether they wish to request funds, and will be able to administer a relief program among victims of the cyclone and tidal wave that devastated the Ganges Delta area there Nov. 13.

"We are awaiting specific requests for relief funds, and I am confident the Foreign Mission Board will respond to an appeal for help," said John D. Hughey, board secretary for Europe and the Middle East (including Pakistan).

Cablegrams received from missionary W. Trueman Moore in East Pakistan have assured the board that all its personnel in East Pakistan are safe following the disaster which may have taken as many as 300,000 lives.

Besides the Moores, other Southern Baptist missionaries currently in East Pakistan are Mr. and Mrs. R. T. Buckley, Mr. and Mrs. Donald W. Jones, Mr. and Mrs. James F. McKinley, Mr. and Mrs. Carl F. Ryther, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas E. Thurman and Mr. and Mrs. James E. Young.

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Protestant Federation of Italy  
Advocates Church-State Reforms

FLORENCE, Italy (BP)--The Protestant Federation of Italy voted here to work for the recognition of conscientious objectors and for the removal of Catholic religion classes from Italian public schools.

The federation also will work to abolish the 1929 Lateran Treaty (between the Vatican and Italy) and the National law prohibiting criticism of the church, reported Mrs. Benjamin R. Lawton, a Southern Baptist missionary who attended the interdenominational meeting as an observer.

Two other "conclusions" of the federation were to refuse any privilege which would violate the principle of separation of church and state and to combat the requirement that evangelical pastors be "recognized" by the state in order to perform pastoral duties, Mrs. Lawton said.

Four Italian Baptists were elected to membership in the Federation's Executive Council. Three are pastors of Baptist churches, and one is woman from Rome. Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists and Waldensians comprise membership of the four-year-old federation.

Holding its second assembly here, the organization also decided "to preach the Gospel from the Bible so that the Gospel message could reach into homes all over Italy," added Mrs. Lawton. Plans were made to study the most modern methods of presentation.

The evangelical paper, Nuovi Tempi, was asked to pursue the same purpose as well as to spread evangelical news and "encourage Christian social activity."

Delegates urged that evangelical radio programs, which are aired on national radio every week during a 20-minute time slot donated to evangelicals by the state, be prepared "with extreme care." Free time on television is expected to be forthcoming, Mrs. Lawton noted.

Eugene Carson Blake, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, conducted a conference on the program of the ecumenical council in the fight against racism. He reminded the delegates that Protestant Italians shared in the decision of the council to designate \$200,000 to "oppressed people and to liberation movements."

The four-day assembly drew representatives from Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Waldensian and ecumenical community churches plus observers from other denominations and groups. The delegates, representing 40,000 evangelicals within the Federation in Italy, re-elected Mario Saffi, a Methodist, for another three-year term as president.

"Although each denominational group had some reservation as to its position in the federation, each felt the . . . need to have a united evangelical voice in this nation where the federation represents only a fraction of the population," said Mrs. Lawton.

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