

## **Before I arrived in Paraguay, I resolved to find God's beauty and God's heart there**

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January 10, 2018



*When the 1975 missionaries were being assigned, they called for volunteers who spoke Spanish. It is said that Veronika Klepper raised her hand. Someone said to her, "But you don't speak Spanish!" To which Veronika replied, "I can learn." Veronika left her native Germany for Paraguay in central South America in 1975. This brief testimony of hers was written many decades ago.*

Before I arrived in Paraguay, I resolved to find God's beauty and God's heart there, and not to compare that land with my homeland. Looking back now, I think that this was an essential point that helped me adapt to the situation. I concentrated on learning the language, and after one year I could speak well enough to teach the Principle in Spanish and also started to learn Guarani, the native people's language. Doing this helped me understand the Paraguayan people.

Probably the most difficult thing to adapt to was getting used to the food. At the beginning I had constant diarrhea. Paraguay has a special kind of jam called gojava, which happened to be the first thing I tasted after I arrived. For the entire first year of my life in Paraguay everything smelled and tasted like this jam to me. And I hated it! But, I made a condition to eat it three times a day. Now I like it.

I lived very simply. I thought it was important to live exactly like the Paraguayans live. Not better and not worse. So I adopted the same lifestyle and lived in the same physical conditions. According to German standards, my lifestyle in Paraguay would be considered extremely poor; according to Paraguayan standards, I lived like the middle class. I wanted to serve my country, so I never compared it to Germany. In Paraguay, everything is so different, and I knew that comparing would leave me defeated.

I was resolved to see the beauty -- to see everything as beautiful there. So I started to read Paraguayan literature, to listen to the music, and to understand it and find its special beauty. And, I could find it. Actually I could love this country. This helped me very much, because if, on top of all the other difficulties, I had disliked my country, I would surely have returned to Germany quickly. But I really came to love my country, my Paraguay.

I consciously offered everything I did and all the difficulties we had -- all the spiritual and physical fights and struggles -- as a sacrifice and a condition for the country. I could do it easily because I love the country.

I felt at home in my country, and I did not have problems with the language. I did not have problems to adapt to the customs because once I could find people then everything changed. My whole outlook on life and on people changed. I came to understand and to like the culture through learning Guarani. This helped me to discover the heart of the people because Guarani is the original language of the Paraguayans, while Spanish is the official language.

I saw many people suffering. The first three years we did social assistance in the prisons. By seeing the suffering of the inmates, I felt great compassion for them. Whenever we missionaries had problems, I reminded myself of the plight of those prisoners. Many innocent people were tortured; and I thought that I

had no right to complain because there are people in much more miserable situations than I -- they don't have any purpose in life, and just cling to life because it is life, not because of a purpose. I really felt that, in spite of the difficulties and the suffering we encountered in the mission, I had faith in God, something many of those people did not possess.

I discovered the heart of Paraguayans and felt much compassion and love for the people mainly through the prisoners we helped. I respected them because I could see their courage in how they clung to life, even though they had no purpose. This touched me very deeply -- how people, without having a real purpose in life, just bravely and courageously continued living. Perhaps, if I had been in similar circumstances, I would have just killed myself. But they continued to live and wanted to live. I admire the capacity of the Paraguayans to suffer and still find a way out.



Paraguayans helped me. They never laugh at a person who speaks their language badly. They respect foreigners and serve them. They have a type of inferiority complex but also an attitude of humility and treat foreigners better than themselves. This love, characteristic of so many of the Paraguayans I met, helped me to love and respect the people of this nation.

I met so many foreigners in Paraguay who said, "Why do you stay in this country?" Physically there is no reason, but I found something I call God's Paraguayan expression, and this is what I could love. Even though Paraguay is a miserable country, without anything special -- no big mountains, no vast ocean or body of water -- it has its own natural beauty.

Of course all countries have their own natural beauty, but the "natural beauty" I refer to is the warm-hearted nature of Paraguayans that is so special. That is God's nature -- His expression here. To me, He made the people the special feature of this nation. They always give of themselves. They have no second thoughts about serving and loving. It is their purity of heart that moved me most.