

**Roaches, pregnant men, painted toenails;
All a part of life on the mission field**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

LAM News Service

Miami, FL (LAMNS)—It could have happened anywhere, but for former LAM missionary Ken Muholland, having it occur in front of his students in a foreign seminary was just a bit too much. Ken, who is now Dean of Columbia Biblical Seminary in South Carolina, allowed their oldest daughter to paint his toenails with bright red fingernail polish. No problem, many parents have allowed their children to do similar things in the privacy of their home. But, the next morning, students at the seminary where he was teaching in Costa Rica lead a chapel service “which, to my surprise, turned out to be the first foot washing service in the history of the school! I leave the rest to your imagination,” he jokes.

While a missionary’s life is dedicated to the serious sharing of the Gospel, moments of humor, even hilarity often occur. Language errors are the most common source of humor on the field according to reports from missionaries around the world, but cultural differences and just plain misunderstanding often contribute to embarrassing if not humorous moments.

“I’m pregnant,” missionary Douane Luttenauer told his Spanish-speaking Aunt. Of course, he didn’t mean that, he was just trying to say that he was embarrassed. But “embarasada” means pregnant in Spanish, and Douane, who serves with the Latin America Mission, made a very common mistake of those learning another language.

HCJB missionary Karen Pedersen admonished a group of nursing home residents in Ecuador that “Jesus didn’t come to earth just to give us another hardware store!” She had confused hardware store (ferretería) with holiday (feriado). Angela Deas, a student at Southern Methodist University who will be working in Mexico this summer with LAM’s Spearhead program, once received octopus, squid, mussels and other marine life on top of her pasta when she ordered “marine spaghetti” instead of “marinated spaghetti”. And, LAM missionary Nancy Sabean in Costa Rica on one occasion told a baby sitter that if her children got hungry, she should “eat them.” Of course, she meant, “feed them.”

But, not all humor on the mission field is language-driven. Sometimes, trying to operate in a different culture can have unexpected consequences. Joan Wilson Carter, who directs Los Sembradores, a Christian relief ministry in Nicaragua, says that she was once arrested and had to drive herself to jail! It seems that she had started a rabbit project to provide meat for poor families. Unfortunately, she discovered that her watchman was stealing from her—he showed up one day wearing one of her belts.

Deciding that something needed to be done about the situation, she drove five miles to the nearest police station where the officers agreed to arrest him. However, as with many police departments around the world, for economic reasons the lawmen didn’t have any transportation. Joan drove them back to her house only to have the watchman accuse her

of being the thief! The police then decided to detain her until they could figure out who the real thief was.

On the way to the jail, one of the police officers proposed marriage. "I want to go to the United States," he said. "The only way I can go is if a Gringa will marry me." Joan declined, but did persuade him to let her go free so she could care for the rabbits.

Or, take the case of Alan Mullins, an LAM missionary working in Brazil. Visiting a parishioner, he refused the offer of coffee because caffeine was causing him some health problems, tea because it could have been made from of any type of leaf and water because he wasn't sure it would be pure. Deciding that he couldn't refuse anything else, he accepted a glass of lukewarm milk with thick cream at the top. "As I began to drink, I noticed something swimming in the milk and underneath the cream discovered a large cockroach doing the backstroke," he remembers. "That was too much. Suddenly, I realized I was standing in front of a large, open window. I quickly threw the milk out the window and was so relieved to have been able to save face."

The problem wasn't solved that easily. "Just then," he relates, "in through the open door comes a little boy with milk running down his face and crying, 'mommy, mommy, that big man threw milk all over me.'"

The Latin America Mission works in partnership with churches and Christian agencies throughout Latin America and supports missionaries and projects in many Latin countries as well as in Spain. LAM is seeking to place new missionaries throughout the region. The U.S. headquarters can be reached at Latin America Mission, Box 52-7900, Miami Springs, FL 33152, by e-mail at info@lam.org, or by calling 1-800-275-8410. The mission's web site may be found at <http://www.lam.org>. LAM's Canadian office is at 3075 Ridgeway Drive, Unit 14, Mississauga, ON L5L 5M6.

Roaches, pregnant men, painted toenails; All a part of life on the mission field, LAM
News Service, March 27, 2000