

January 3, 2009

Shannon Sullivan and Amanda Stevens

Angel Dust

Coming from cold and dreary winter weather, the color and vibrancy in Venezuela is refreshing. We drove in early Friday morning to see the blue lights of Caracas strewn across the mountainside like lights on a Christmas tree. The lights are blue because the government launched an initiative last year to exchange regular light bulbs for energy saving ones. Already we could see *la Revolución* at work.

The rest of Friday was rather uneventful because we spent it eating *arepas* as we stopped along the road, and driving/sitting in traffic. Once we made it to Sanare, the closest city of 25,000 to Monte Carmelo and Las Lajitas, it was dark so we settled into El Cerrito, a beautiful and tranquil posada. Since we arrived after dark and were exhausted so we waited until morning to explore the city.



January 3rd started off briskly for most of us as we braved our first cold showers of the trip. After that chilly wake-up, we all congregated in the dinning area for a delicious breakfast of scrambled eggs, pulled pork, black beans and *queso blanco* or *queso campesino*. Yum.

Again as we walked down into the small town, brightly colored green, pink, and blue homes and businesses dominated the landscape. Signs for businesses and pro-Chavez “public service announcements” of sorts were posted or painted on the walls; other pro-Chavez graffiti adorned the buildings. For such a small town (it’s a little smaller than Carlisle), people were everywhere. In the center of the town, like in Caracas, there is the plaza dedicated to Simon Bolivar which is the perfect place to sit in the shade and wait for a breeze during the hot Venezuelan afternoons.



Some of the highlights of our adventures in Sanare:

Claire and Amanda lost the plaza and wandered into the residential areas and got to see first hand how the residents of Sanare were living. It was an interesting combination of old and new, advanced technology and simple machines. Loud booming stereos were sitting next to hand tools for farming and gardening under clotheslines strung from one house to another. Dogs and children ran around everywhere in the sun. When they made it back into town they stopped at an internet café to shoot a message home to assure their mothers they had not perished during the flight to Caracas or succumbed to the water.



While at the computer, they discovered a girl on Facebook and after some halted explanations, made their first Venezuelan Facebook friend! A few members of the group stopped by the highly acclaimed (by Professor Rose) German bakery and discovered that our dear Profesora Rosa is one of their favorite customers.

After that bit of exploration, a small group of students went with Professor Rose to introduce ourselves to Irlanda Espinoza, a woman who has worked with survivors of domestic violence since she was fifteen. She has a keen awareness of *El Proceso* (the revolutionary process going on in Venezuela today). We talked with her about our projects on alternative medicine, midwifery, the elitism of the organic industry, and spirituality, as well as violence against women. She has a poster of Chavez in the back room. She talked about the Church and how she came to la Revolucion through liberation theology which challenged the hierarchy and patriarchy of the Catholic Church. Irlanda was a fascinating person to and was so open to talk about anything. We will be talking to her again next week.

From there we split again, one group rode with the baggage up to Monte Carmelo while half of the group made the steep, and one could say, epic hike up the mountain.

For the hike, we walked through some of the older parts of town before we found ourselves in the lush country side. We hiked down the side of the mountain Sanare is located on and had to ford a stream to keep going. The water was so crisp and cold! Steve told us that this water is the same that feeds Monte Carmelo and Las Lajitas and we might get a chance to climb up to its source, a natural spring deep in the mountains.



From there of it was uphill. We were all equally stunned by the beautiful views from the side of the mountain, the rich vegetation, the green grass and the vibrant flowers, as well as by the sheer climb we were making. We huffed and puffed up a whole mountain with buzzards eying us as potential meals as we went. Luckily no one ended up as bird food and when we finally reached our goal, Monte Carmelo, we felt like we could conquer the world!



Those of us who sacrificed the epic hike and took the easy way up hauled the luggage onto the pick-up truck and hopped into the back of the truck for a great ride up. The view as we climbed the mountain was amazing, just the ways in which the sun touched the crevices in between the mountains and on the houses here and there. We got off the truck to meet the hikers and we met some of the people we will be working with the rest of the week. Then we began the last trek the rest of the way to the *Casa Campesina* where we will be staying. Even though those of us who had not hiked to Monte Carmelo were well-rested, the hike was still a little intense, but it felt good to have to rely on no one but ourselves to get up the hill.



We settled into our new home for the next week and set to work making dinner. Our creation was really a group effort. A great pasta dinner with tomatoes, onions, garlic and peppers overseen by Mathias, master chef! Dessert was Rodrigo's, one of our new Argentinean friends, contribution, CHOCOLATE!



From there, a few adventurous souls wandered down to Monte Carmelo to mingle and gaze at the stars and the rest of the group started a fierce game of Catch Phrase. The highlight of the game was Angel Dust: Natalie was trying to get her team to guess the word, and for some reason (hmmm?) Professor Rose was the first person to have any idea what she was talking about. Interesting...