

July 2000

I thought you might be interested in how the “delivery of the medicine” went yesterday. It was quite a day, so I will try to tell you a little about it.

I arrived at the boat dock in time to catch the 8:30 AM Monday Ferry for Bataan. This took some doing, since I just arrived at the hotel at about 9:30 PM Sunday night. After traveling for about 21 hours, I was still pretty tired. So, there I was with my two boxes of medicines, one weighing 32 lbs and the other 34 lbs....just me and a few hundred Filipinos. It should be noted that the ferry's usually do not run on time, so if you are late, it should not be a problem. Well, as luck would have it, on Monday, they also did not run on time - they left early!!!.....in other words, “I missed the boat”. The next one was “scheduled” for 10:15. So, fortunately I had brought a book along and I settled in to read. The boat arrived right on schedule this time, and I lugged my boxes of drugs aboard, carried them upstairs and stored them, found a seat and continued to read my book as we departed Manila harbor and headed across the Bay. Please remember that 2 days ago, the Philippines was hit by Typhoon Edeng and consequently, there was quite a bit of debris floating in the Bay (trees and so on). About 15 minutes into the trip, the boat lurched and came to a stop - we had hit something and apparently bent the propeller shaft. We could make it back to the harbor.....albiet a slow return. So, we again arrived at the dock and had to get off. I worked my way through the crowd, climbed the stairs and carried my boxes to the pier. I again settled in with my book (same seat as before) and waited for the next boat to arrive, which it did at 11:15. (I was starting to feel the jet lag a bit).

By now, the crowd had doubled since it was carrying 2 loads of people - but it was a bigger boat, so that was not a problem. I picked up my drugs and boarded the sturdy craft, and away we went (successfully this time) to Bataan. We arrived at the pier in Orion at about 12:30 PM. Since their telephone service has been cut off for the past few months, no one at King's Garden knew I was coming, so no one met the boat. I carried my boxes to a tired old jeepney and loaded them on. That beast roared to life, belching fire and smoke and we proceeded out of the parking area to the Bataan Death March Highway. Just before getting there, the jeepney gasped, wheezed and died!!!! This was not a problem however, since the driver had anticipated this possibility and carried a spare battery right beside my feet. He quickly jumped out, changed the battery and the jeepney roared to life again, with an appreciative belch of smoke and fire - and away we went.

You will remember that the Typhoon had just gone through the area, so the “road” to the orphanage was just about non-existent. It was an experience similar to driving through the Grand Canyon, so we bounced and lurched through muck and mire merrily belching smoke and fire all the way. At one point, we had to stop and hold the lines (I think they might have been telephone lines) above the jeepney so we could get through. No one was electrocuted, so I am assuming they were telephone lines anyhow. Finally, we arrived at KGCH (total distance from the pier is only about 5 or 6 KM). I was certainly happy that those 2 boxes were finally “home”!!! By this time, it was about 1:00 PM. The kids had finished their lunch and all were napping - it was very quiet. We went through the boxes and the medicines contained therein were certainly worth the effort it took to get them there. They were wonderful - there was everything!! Even colored Band-Aids with cartoon characters on them. I wish I knew the total value of the boxes, but it had to be in the 2 thousand

dollar range.... Jody was most appreciative. I then took a brief tour of the construction and progress was evident, but I think I was hoping for a little more progress. The workers were hard at it.

When the kids woke up at 1:30, they all trooped into the play room and we had them gather around the 2 boxes so I could send a picture to MAP International to thank them for the donated drugs. It was fun - the kids LOVE to get their pictures taken.

Jody then filled me in on current events and some more sad stories that I will tell you later. She looked good, but I still wonder how she does it. I met the social worker, who seems to be a really nice Filipino lady.

By this time, it was approaching 2:30 and because of the problems with the ferry, I did not want to miss the 3:00 return (there is also a 5:30 return). So, Jody “drove” me back down “the road” to the pier. I was just in time and hurried to the ticket office, waving a cheerful good-bye to Jody as she drove out of the parking area. As I arrived, the girl said “no boat!!” I said “how do you say that you’re joking in Tagalog??” She quizzically looked at me and when I said, well, I have my book, I can sit here in the hot sun with no shade until 5:30 - no problem, she said, “no boat”. It took a bit for me to realize that she was not joking - there was no boat - both were broken down!!! She wasn’t certain there would even be one on Tuesday either. At this point, I put my book away (at least I did not have those 2 boxes) and I considered my “alternatives”. She said I

could take the bus from Balanga (about 15 KM away) and the bus trip to Manila would only be about 6 hours (remembering of course that the Typhoon had flooded the roads). By the way, Philippine buses are crowded beyond capacity, have no air conditioning and the 95 degree heat with the humidity resulting from days of rain made it just a little less than the ideal situation. I looked quickly in the parking lot and saw a man sleeping there and asked if he would drive me to Manila. He would be happy to. So, he rounded up 2 of his closest friends and we started up the Bataan Death March Highway for the anticipated 3 hour drive (private car - not a bus so it was faster) to Manila. It was a pretty nice vehicle - a van, relatively new and I imagine that if they had recharged the air-conditioning, it would have been quite comfortable. The vibration in the front end wasn’t bad at all and I was confident that it would make it to Manila.

The trip up the Highway was really interesting. All 3 of my new friends were really nice and since I was asking a lot of W.W.II history questions, they pointed out all of the historic sites and were quite informative. We went through the Province of Bataan. Then, into the province of Pampanga. This is where all of the Lahar victims live. You will recall that Lahar is the ash from the Mt. Pinutubo explosion of a few years ago. The area was devastated and really sad. People still live in this wasteland. We then entered the Province of Bulacan, which is the province that had the most flooding in the Typhoon earlier in the week. It was still flooded. At one point, we were driving down the flooded road, with water around my feet, and a canoe went by us. I tried to take a picture, but the window was covered with water and I could not get a clear shot. If they had had a windshield wiper, it would have helped. The entire area was flooded and people were still living in their flooded homes. We came into a small town and a tricycle (motorbike with a sidecar) cut in front of us and of course, we hit him. Not bad, it just broke a turn signal lens on our vehicle and I think it might have ripped the fender off the trike. We stopped so the driver could assess the damage to our car - they shouted a few Tatalog obscenities at each other and we proceeded on. I

tried to catch what he said, but was not able to do so. As you might expect, on Monday, major protests were carried out in Manila to protest the high gas prices. So, there was a public transit strike.

Traffic was terrible - but then it always is in Manila, so I didn't pay much attention - on we pressed. Finally, we were within about 6 blocks of the hotel, stopped in the traffic. I thanked my new friends, paid them what they asked (plus a significant tip - they earned it) and got out and walked the rest of the way to the hotel (by the way, it was raining by now - but I did have my umbrella). It is now 9:00 Tuesday and I can't help but wonder if they have made it back to Bataan yet!! As you might expect, it had been a long but very interesting day. I certainly saw and learned a lot - but I was very tired. This is why I did not call in on Monday. But, the kids at KGCH now have the long awaited drugs—and I do have to say that it was worth the trip!! I would do it for them again tomorrow if I could. This is really what life is all about.

John