

ENTREVISTA.-

We interview Nahir Justiniano de Ticona, teacher at the San Lorenzo School

Where is the school located?

The school is located in Puerto San Lorenzo, which is in the community of Santa Ana de Yacuma, some fifteen minutes from the town, in Beni, the eastern part of Bolivia.

The eastern part? Do you mean the jungle?

Yes, our little school is practically in the middle of the jungle, and it's next to the Yacuma River.

When was the school founded?

The school was created August 10, 1973. It started with only two grades - first and second. When it started there weren't a lot of children, because the town wasn't very populated, but little by little it began to grow and now there's a lot of need.

How many children did the school have when it started?

There were five children in first grade and three in second grade.

Where did the school begin?

The school began in the chapel that the community owned.

But the chapel is just one classroom. Where did the other grade meet?

We only had the chapel, so we used to use two walls.

Were the children just from the town?

Yes, at that time the children only came from that town. We didn't have any children from the other neighboring towns. That's because we only had first and second grades. The children were much too young to walk very far to come to our little school, because their parents worked.

How did you decide to enlarge the school? Open up other grades?

It was decided for the good of the children. Since we only had two grades, they were stuck and couldn't study any further than second grade. Little by little we put things into place. We couldn't do it all from the start, since there's no infrastructure and we didn't have teachers either.

When did you open up other grades?

I'm not sure, but in the school's thirty-nine years, we are very proud to have from first to tenth grade. We just need two more grades and we can say that we have high school graduates from our school.

When are you thinking of opening those two grades?

It's very difficult, because one has to deal with the government and the Annual Operating Plan, so they can staff the school with teachers and make more classroom space. We don't have enough classrooms and we have to keep dividing rooms to make more grades.

So you still don't have the necessary classrooms?

No, we still don't. The school has five classrooms and each one is divided in two. That's why we only have up to tenth grade. Another thing is we just have one teacher per classroom, so we have five teachers teaching two grades at the same time.

And why does that happen? Are there no teachers? Is there no budget?

It happens because there's no budget. A lot of teachers want to come here, because the salary is a bit more, since it's a rural area. So, when the school year starts, there is some jockeying for position.

How many students are there now?

We now have over sixty. Sixty-two to be exact.

Do they continue to be just from this community?

No, now they come from other towns, but not a lot. It must be between 10 and 20%.

What basic services do you have?

We don't have much. We get our water from a well. Before it was worse. We had to fetch water from the river, but now we have a well which helps us a lot.

How about a bathroom?

We have a bathroom, but it's the classic rural type, made up of walls with a hole in the floor.

What do you need most?

What we need most are school supplies, because the children often don't have anything to write with, or write on, or to read. One book must be shared throughout the entire grade. Infrastructure is also needed, because we're still holding classes in the chapel. In my class we don't have a door. I made one of reeds tied together with thread, just to be able to close our classroom.

Finally, is there anything you'd like to say?

Well, in our little school there are a lot of stories, some pleasant, some sad.

The children only have one notebook. What we teachers do is have them write everything in pencil and when all twenty or fifty pages of their notebooks are full - that's ALL they get ALL YEAR - we begin to erase the first page and they write there, then the second page, and so on. We do this so they'll have somewhere to write, because if didn't, they wouldn't have anywhere to do it.

We get drinking water from the well, but to wash our hands and everything else, we fetch water from the river.