

Krzysztof Drzymalski, '08

Cochabamba, Bolivia

For six weeks in the summer of 2007, I worked in the Orphanage San Francisco located in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The orphanage housed 57 orphan girls ranging from a one year-old to a nineteen year-old and was run by only three Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The entire experience has had an incredible impact on me as a person and has created a special place in my heart for these precious Bolivian orphans.



Photo 1. The only Ambulance that serviced the five towns of Layrete.

Taylor Kahnke, fellow program student and friend, and I arrived in Bolivia only one week after Junior Year finals ended. At first, we worked in a clinic in a small village, Layrate, a mile higher in altitude above Cochabamba helping the only medical doctor in the region with physical exams. Unfortunately, we only saw five patients a day and we felt that we were not doing enough and could do more to help the poor of Bolivia. Therefore, after a few days we returned to the city of Cochabamba and went in search of a new site.



Photo 2. Orphanage San Francisco.

Within two days, quite unexpectedly, we met a Polish nun who helped us find this orphanage.

Because the orphanage was all female, every morning we traveled by public bus to the orphanage located on the outskirts of the city and returned to our residence via bus around seven in the evening.

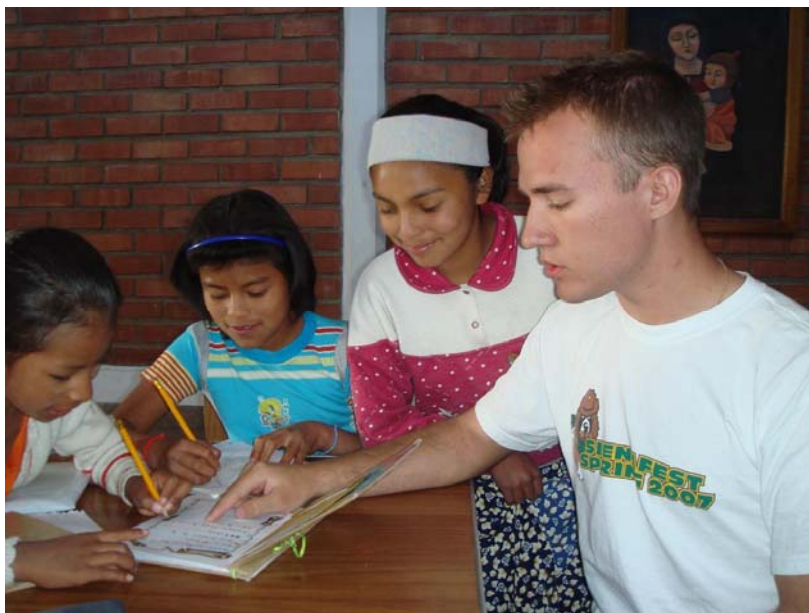


Photo 3. Sylvia, Ana, Aide and I working on homework.

Everyday from 3 pm until 5:30 pm the children were required to do homework and study. I worked with the 1-6 graders helping them with math, history, religion, geography, and Spanish

homework. Many of these girls had a tougher time learning than their peers because their schooling was delayed and not seen as important. Many children in the countryside were required to work in the fields for the family, not attend school. Therefore, when they came to the orphanage, some had to begin from first grade at an older age. Helping them with their schooling was most rewarding, especially when fifth grader Mariana hugged me and thanked me saying that because I helped teach her long division, she scored a one hundred on a quiz. She cried as she told me the news which opened a river in my eyes as I was proud of what she accomplished. That quiz helped spark an intense interest in her for learning and raised her chances for successful academics.



Photo 4. Baking Bread.

In addition to helping the children with their homework, I particularly enjoyed baking bread and helping the older orphans cook food for the entire house. Every 3-4 days they baked bread, a process that took about five hours, baking approximately 300-400 small loaves. Because there were so many orphans, they had three rooms where they ate. Each table had an older child who was responsible for ensuring that each person at their table was fed. Even though many of these orphans had been abused and did not have families, they still had the capacity to show love and care to the others in the orphanage.



Photo 5. Some of the precious orphan girls. Top- Sisters Lydia and Silvia. Bottom- Marta.

Each of the children has a personal story telling how they came to the orphanage. Lydia and Silvia are sisters who lost their mother a year ago and were brought to the orphanage for fear of abuse by their father and older brothers. Marta's story is quite tragic and heart-breaking. At the age of four, she was sold by her mother to a family who wanted her to work washing their clothes in the freezing cold river. She worked for three years and at the age of seven she was so

weak that she could no longer work. The family threw her out on the street where she was found and brought to the orphanage. How can a mother sell her child?? Marta had one of the brightest smiles at the orphanage and my heart wept upon hearing this story.



Photo 6. Birthday Celebration with Bolivian traditions.

I celebrated my twenty-first birthday in Bolivia at the orphanage. We bought two cakes for the orphans and they surprised me with a Bolivian tradition; the birthday person must take a bite out of the cake while (unexpectedly for me since I did not know about the tradition) those holding the cake let it slip into your face. The children and I laughed for a while and their smiles were well worth it. I could not have imagined a happier birthday than the one I had while at the orphanage.



Photo 7. An inspiration.

My Summer of Service in Bolivia showed me the poverty that exists around the world while demonstrating the happiness in the lives of children who live in such impoverished areas. One smile from any of these orphans was worth more than anything else in the world. I miss each and every one of them and hope to return again. As I move through my final year at Siena and prepare for Medical School, I know that this experience will follow me wherever I go and be an integral part of who I am and what I do.