

I was privileged to be the missionary on International Ministries' 2000 Xtreme Team to the Philippines. I was able to spend 30+ days with six (6) young people from the United States as they were immersed in missions. Our Team consisted of these six young people, three other adult leaders (one Filipino) and myself.

I want to begin giving you a little background on what an Xtremers is. (Xtreme Teams are a wonderful program of our American Baptist Churches' International Ministries—this summer's team has been in Thailand.) You have to be between the ages of 18 – 30, recommended by your church and be willing to travel to a foreign land for about a month without knowing your itinerary or what you will be doing each day! Your parents will not be given the itinerary, you can't trust parents. All you will know is where your destination is, when you leave the United States and when you will return. Our Team only knew that they were off to the Philippines.

We gathered for a week-end of orientation in Los Angeles. Which was far more Xtreme than we had planned. If you remember the summer of 2000, it was the summer that United Airline pilots participated in a slow down. All the Xtremers were scheduled to be in LA by 9 a.m. on Saturday and at 4 p.m. we were still at LAX waiting for some to arrive. We were waiting for two teams – in 2000 one team went to the Philippines and another went to Thailand. In order to help with the Xtreme theme we gave the Philippine team some Thai experiences in LA and the Thai team some Philippine experiences.

As planned, I flew back to the Philippines the night before the Xtremers. They needed to make the journey alone, experiencing customs, etc. as a team. Now their trip began with more xtreme adventure as one of the engines of their 747 blew out on take-off. Thus, they had an extra day in LA, without luggage – it stayed with the plane. And, the day delay meant that they arrived in the Philippines during a typhoon.

They arrived and the experience continued. Each morning brought a new x-file, a clue that would determine what they would be doing for that day. It could be teaching a kindergarten class at Veteran's Village (a day care/school for the children of those living on the waterfront in Iloilo). Or, maybe they would lead a worship service (including the sermon) at the local church. They would spend one day with students at Central Philippine University, attending classes, etc. (although we discovered that 4 of the 6 had students who thought this would be a good excuse to skip classes and show their guests the city!). Three days would be spent living with the students of Convention Baptist Bible College. Here they would shadow the students, live in their dorms, eat with them (this meant cooking their own meals since meals are not provided) and build a fish pond.

At CBBC students have to buy and prepare their own meals. Since most come from poor homes it is almost all that they can do to pay their tuition (\$100 US per year). The President of the school had the dream of a fish pond on the campus so that the students could literally catch their own supper. The Xtreme team's gift to the school was funds to build the fish pond and Xtremers to help dig and prepare it. It is a wonderful pond and is still providing fresh fish for CBBC students.

The team also hiked to a mountain village, had a wonderful two days at a beach resort during a typhoon, worked with Habitat for Humanity in building homes in

Manila, visited a youth detention facility, spent time with Jonathan and Thelma Nambu who have opened a program for women and girls in Manila working to get them off the streets and out of prostitution. And much, much more. It was a time of Xtremes.

Two events stand out. The first was our visit to Payatas. Payatas was the garbage dump landfill for Manila. It was here that people scavenged through the garbage, collecting water bottles and other plastic items that could be recycled. The plastic is shipped to China where it is recycled into carpets, etc. which we use in our homes! Our contact for this adventure was a Christian lawyer from Manila who had organized a co-op for the scavengers. The co-op had secured government loans for trucks to haul the plastic to recycling places, secure the best price possible, put funds into a retirement account and provide health insurance. Most of the people had bought small plots of land at the bottom of the landfill; they owned the land, they had a future. The Xtremers were to spend the day with the scavengers, scavenging with them. What they did not know was that they were to be paid for their day's work, by the kilo, and that would be what they would have to buy their food for that day – this was how the people existed each day.

As you may have picked up, this was a summer of typhoons. The typhoon that we experienced at the beach was also experienced by those living at Payatas. The mountain of garbage was between 3-5 stories tall. At around 7 a.m. one morning the wall began to shift. Tons of garbage began to slide and the village where most of the scavengers lived was quickly buried. There is no clear count of how many people died that day. We were not sure we would be able to get the Xtreme Team there, but we did. However, instead of scavenging with them, we listened to their stories. We met with one mom who was taking her kids to school. As she looked back at the noise she saw the wall of garbage bury her home, her husband, her parents, his parents, her brothers and sisters and two of her children. She and the young child who went with her and her two school age children were all that was left. We prayed with her and then we were able to stand on a portion of the collapsed garbage and pray for those buried beneath and the survivors.

Another night we were to spend with street kids. Our host for that day was a Christian man who had worked with these youth for years and had gained the approval of the Manila authorities and police. The kids knew that they would be safe with him and would not be hassled by the police. We met and were oriented to our plans for the evening. We were not to bring anything we would not want to lose: watches, jewelry, cameras, etc. Little money was to be brought and we were not to give the kids anything. I wondered what I was getting myself and these young people into. The time came and we met at an intersection where 5 major roads meet in Quezon City. The traffic island is about the size of our church yard – and it was empty. However our host assured us that the kids would discover he was there and would soon be arriving. He was right. We were soon surrounded with kids as young as six and as old as their mid-teens. All were living on/off the streets. One teenage girl was looking after two of the younger ones. They were not related but she had designated herself their guardian. We heard their stories, most spoke good English, for most of them the street was safer than their homes. We played games, laughed, danced, cried and just spent a night with some wonderful kids.

The evening passed too fast and it was getting time to leave. I knew that we could not give them money, etc. I asked our host if we could feed them. He said, of course. So, I called over our “go-for” and told him what we needed. Ernie was our Filipino team member and he was responsible for getting us where we needed to go and providing us with things we needed. He quickly disappeared and was soon back. He had found a bakery open, Goldilocks, and had cleaned them out of brownies. Not much else was available at 2 a.m. He had also found boxes of Kool-Aid and so we were all set with juice and brownies. We gathered in a circle, sat on the ground and prayed. Some of the street kids prayed too, thanking God for their new friends and the fun they had had. Then we shared in the brownies and juice.

As we were sharing, my mind (and I later learned the mind of most of the team) went back to another night, in another place, where another group gathered for an evening event. They shared around the table and as they shared their host took the bread and wine and gave it to them. He said that this bread was his body, given. The wine was his blood, shed. Whenever they would gather and eat and drink they would do so in remembrance of him. On this night on a traffic island in Quezon City, Manila, the Philippines—brownies and juice were shared in remembrance of him.

Come and share again in remembrance of Him.