

Kids in Guyana Grow in God's Grace

When Cissie Graham Lynch told people she was visiting Guyana this summer, the first question most people asked was “*Where?*”

“Guyana is a place that most people have never heard of,” Cissie explains. “A lot of people assume it’s in Africa.”

Situated on the northern coast of South America, Guyana was a former colony of the Dutch and the British. Rubbing shoulders with Brazil, Venezuela, Suriname and the Atlantic Ocean, Guyana is one of the very few Caribbean nations that isn’t an island.

The landscape, says Cissie, is nothing less than breathtaking: “The beauty was surreal. Hollywood spends millions to create movie sets that look like this, but they still do not come close.”

But the pristine Amazonian rainforests, immense waterfalls and amazing wildlife could not begin to compare to the beauty of the children Cissie met.

And that brings us to the second question she heard—“*Why* are you going to Guyana?”

Cissie shares the reason for her trip, which was captured on video for the latest Billy Graham Television Special: “We went down there to observe a classroom setting of The Greatest Journey, a follow-up discipleship program of Operation Christmas Child.”

As she visited one of the classrooms, kids giggled as they gathered under the open-air, thatched-roof pavilion, waiting for their lesson to begin. The volunteer teacher walked miles to get there, bringing his three children with him. Other than

the tropical setting, the classroom was just like any other Sunday school, says Cissie. There were sing-a-longs, Bible stories, memory verses and activities.

One child that Cissie can't forget is Samuel: "He received an OCC shoebox about five years ago," she recalls. "He still had his very favorite toy, a Fisher Price phone. It was old and had no batteries, so we replaced them and when the phone began to ring, his eyes just lit up!"

Now the journey that began with a shoe box continues as he attends The Greatest Journey classes with his friends. "In Samuel," says Cissie, "I witnessed a joyful spirit, eager to share what he was learning about Jesus."

For those not familiar with the ministry, Cissie gives a thumbnail overview: "The Greatest Journey is the next step after the shoe box. It is a discipleship program run by local volunteers who go into churches and do a 12-course program of Bible stories and Scripture memory. When a child completes the course, they have a graduation ceremony where they receive a certificate of completion and a Bible. For many of these kids, it will be the first Bible in their homes and the first one they ever received."

In 2010, 761 children started The Greatest Journey in Guyana and 477 graduated. Seventy-five children prayed to accept Jesus as their Savior, while 246 children committed to share their faith with friends and family. All of the graduates received New Testaments.

In 2011, 2,345 Guyanese children began The Greatest Journey and approximately 2,000 will graduate from the classrooms of 100 trained teachers.

Cissie points out how important it is that each of the teachers is a volunteer. "You can see the importance of a self-sustaining program as they are going in there and discipling children in the gospel."

During her visit, a new law went into effect whereby missionaries can no longer renew their visas. "It is God's perfect timing that we are raising up a generation within Guyana that can proclaim the gospel to the next generation and the next, and so on," Cissie adds.

While the program is really very simple, it can change a child's life. "Some of the children are coming out of hard homes with tough situations," Cissie points out. "We don't know what life is going to bring them later, but we know they will be equipped to handle it. They will be prepared with Scripture placed in their hearts."

Joseph Barker, a full-time volunteer in Guyana, understands the needs of the children in his country. "Some people are so poor that their children cannot go to school because they don't have a book or pencil to write with," he says. "The children are the ones that are suffering in these times. I want these children to come to know the Lord, Jesus Christ as their personal savior."

The Greatest Journey classroom is the only place where some of the kids could learn about Jesus Christ—and the very first time they heard His name. "I think that it's important for us back at home to realize the need for this program," Cissie explains. "We have churches in every neighborhood, right in our backyards sometimes and Sunday school available to us at all times. But this might be the only opportunity for children in countries like Guyana."

Cissie was pleased to see that the discipleship didn't stop with the children: "The kids went back to their villages and now parents are curious. Churches are starting to grow, and churches are being planted through these programs. The opportunity to share the Gospel was sparked with the shoe box gift, ignited by the discipleship of The Greatest Journey, and then spread across villages and communities like wildfire."

This is just the beginning, Cissie says. "The Greatest Journey is a young program, but I already see kids' hearts set on fire. This project is now heavy on my heart because I see the importance and the effect The Greatest Journey can have on an entire nation," she adds. "One day the toys will be gone. But the Gospel does not perish, spoil or fade."

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