



Bob/Beto Thatch and Rachel Hogan of CSN Kansas City with Reynelio Yagari and Ancisar Gutierrez upon arrival at the KC Airport

Report of a South-to-North Delegation

By Bob/Beto Thatch

The Kansas City CSN Chapter hosted two visitors from Colombia from October 25 to Nov. 13, 2011. Even now, months later, we feel amazed at what a great experience we had, and how many things were accomplished during their visit.

Ancisar Gutierrez and Reynelio Yagari came from K.C.'s "sister community" of the indigenous Embera Chamí people in Putumayo. In planning for their visit, their first challenge was to get passports, which they were able to do with help from Cecilia when she met with them in southern Colombia last year. The second obstacle was to travel to Bogotá to apply for their visas at the U.S. Embassy. Everything went smoothly and their visas were ready the next day.

Report of a South-to-North Delegation continued

Arrangements were made for tickets to the U.S., but one more difficulty awaited them when they had to change planes in the Atlanta airport. They could not find anyone who could speak Spanish, but somehow they got to the right gate for their connecting flight, and arrived safely in Kansas City.

For their entire visit, each event was even better than we could have planned. Over and over, we were taken aback with how everything “clicked” to produce good results. Here are a few examples:

We had an appointment with the “Kansas City Star” newspaper, and we expected to do a brief interview there. Instead we met for nearly an hour with the full Editorial Board of the newspaper.

When preparing for our presentation in St. Louis, we were asked if someone in the St. Louis group would be allowed to record the event. But instead of a simple audio recording, the St. Louis audience member did a full video recording using three digital cameras, and produced a beautiful DVD, including custom cover art.

This issue of our newsletter is exclusively dedicated to the multiple activities carried out by our CSN Kansas City Chapter to welcome the first visit to them by representatives of their Sister Community in Colombia, the Emberá - Chamí from the rural area of La Hormiga in Putumayo.



Ancisar and Reynelio having fun with the stuffed displays

We have never been successful in getting appointments with politicians. While Ancisar and Reynelio were here one of our members contacted the office of Kansas U.S. Senator Jerry Moran, and our group was welcomed at his office to speak at length about Colombia.

We had permission from Hollman Morris to show his new documentary film “Impunity,” and a local theater operator gave us the use of a beautiful theater completely free of charge. We “passed the hat” to the 95 attendees, and received almost \$500.

We traveled 50 miles west to Topeka, Kansas, to do a program for a peace group. It turned out they were “Engineers Without Borders,” so the information about a need for roads, electricity, and purified water reached the perfect audience.

A customer at our store was sending an e-mail, and I noticed that her e-mail address contained the word “beads.” So I showed her the bracelet I was wearing, from the Embera Chamí community and asked her where I could buy a supply of beads for them to work with. She described my bracelet as made of “#11 seed beads,” and gave me two internet sites for obtaining quality beads at good prices. I ordered several packets and they arrived in the mail in a few days, while our guests were still here.

One day they were at our store when I suffered what was later diagnosed as a back spasm. It was extremely painful, and I was barely able to stand or walk. One of our members, Rachel Hogan, explained to Ancisar and Reynelio what was happening, and she told me Ancisar might be able to help me. We went

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Action On Colombia is the official newsletter of the Colombia Support Network, a national peace and justice network of groups and individuals working to promote respect for human rights in Colombia and a just relationship between the United States and Colombia through grass-roots activism.

CSN supports a nonviolent, negotiated resolution to the conflict in Colombia.

CSN is the only current project of Wisconsin Interfaith Committee on Latin America

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into the office, and he motioned for me to raise my shirt. He took a vial of liquid out of his backpack and rubbed the potion on my lower back while he mumbled prayerful words. He put some of the liquid on my hands and my head, and within a few minutes my back was much improved. For the remainder of the visit, I called him “Doctor” Gutierrez.

Ancisar and Reynelio were great representatives for their community. They sang and played instruments at each engagement, which contributed a great deal to their presentations as “Ambassadors of the Embera Chamí people.”

Our itinerary included a total of about a thousand miles of highway travel, to do programs in St. Louis, Kirksville, and Columbia, Missouri, plus the Kansas City events, and trips to Lawrence and Topeka in Kansas. Ancisar and Reynelio spoke in schools and libraries, they visited farms and museums, The American Royal and the Kansas City Zoo. They had the brand-new experiences of seeing a train and going to a movie. We toured Haskell Indian Nations University, and went to the top of the St. Louis Arch (“¡Muy alto!”).

There was only one continuing problem: the Kansas City weather in the fall, which we considered mild this year, seemed unbearably cold to our visitors. The only environment in which they were comfortable was in the “Tropics” section at the Zoo, a building where they maintain high humidity and about 85 degrees temperature.

Our thanks cannot be adequately expressed for the many persons who helped arrange events, accommodated our guests, provided transportation and hosted dinners: Rachel Hogan, Maria Pelto, Peter Stauffacher, Judy Thatch and Ann Suellentrop. Several translators assisted during their presentations and



Reynelio and Ancisar speaking in St. Louis, Missouri

interviews. (In one case, at a school program, the school’s security guard was from Venezuela. A student assigned to the task did a good job with most of the translating, and when she occasionally stumbled on a word, the security guard helped her.)

Thanks especially to our many financial supporters, who contributed over \$4,000 to make the trip possible.

Many thanks to Jack and Cecilia,

in the national CSN office, for the arrangements for passports, for accommodations and transportation in Bogotá, for airline tickets, and even coming to Kansas City for the last two days of the visit.

It was such a special experience for me that I decided to change my name, in solidarity with my Colombian friends, so now I am “Beto” instead of Bob.

Stuffed Humans?

By Bob Beto

On the first day of their visit, Judy and I gave them a “familiarization” tour of K.C. Among other places, we went to Cabela’s Outfitters to see the display of stuffed animals and the live fish in aquariums. (If you haven’t been there, it’s like a natural history museum.)

At Cabela’s, among a display of dozens of stuffed deer and antelope there were portrayals of two woodsmen with hunting rifles. Then, several days later, at the Westward Expansion Museum at the St. Louis Arch, there was a life-size portrayal of a Native American, in his buckskins, with extensive beadwork and feathers, with a child standing beside him. In both cases,

Ancisar and Reynelio seemed unhappy with the displays.

A few days later, in the middle of the night, it occurred to me: Ancisar and Reynelio had never seen anything like that before, and by their reactions, they may be thinking the humans in the displays are “stuffed,” formerly alive, like the animals. When we got up the next morning, I had Judy help me explain that the animals were once alive, and their skins had been stuffed with material to make them appear life-like, but the portrayals of human beings were entirely artificial, made of plastic and wax. I said we would never “stuff” a human being’s skin for a display. They thanked Judy and me for the explanation, and seemed quite relieved.

Translating Concepts

By Judy Thatch

Bishop Ward High School, Kansas City, Kansas

The visit to Bishop Ward high school was the day after Ancisar and Reynelio saw the film "Impunity." I sat next to them as they watched the film and since most of it was in Spanish with English subtitles, I didn't need to translate hardly anything. I watched them as they saw the movie and suddenly realized that they had an expression of surprise on their faces as we watched stories and trial testimony of the horrendous actions in Colombia against normal citizens. I asked them if they knew about those stories and trials and they said they didn't. They were very surprised to see interviews of the victims' families of killings in Colombia and even interviews of the paramilitary leaders who did the killing of campesinos in Colombia -- they had no idea that any of that had taken place in Colombia. There were very upset about it. The extent of their experience in Putumayo has been losing their crops because of fumigations and not so much guerilla or paramilitary actions.

Today at Bishop Ward high school, they spoke at two different sessions, and both groups of students in the auditorium were very respectful.

Their presentations on this day were very different from the other presentations that I had heard. I was used to hearing them use the term "Mother Earth" at least 20 times in any given venue, but that day Mother Earth may have been mentioned once or twice. Instead they talked about the violence in Colombia and I recognized

the comments and experiences from the movie the previous night. It became obvious to me that they didn't know much about the violence in their country except from what they had seen the night before in "Impunity."

A typical question from an audience continued to be, "How can we help you?" and the answer was usually, "Help us protect the environment," however on that day their answer was, "Help stop the violence in Colombia."

Their answers to questions from audiences that I had heard were general answers and never specific. "Protect Mother Earth" and "Stop the violence in Colombia" are things that no individual group can take on but I don't know if they realized that. Their world is small enough that they might perceive that a small group of people could make changes that would improve their world. The perspective of a larger earth controlled by a much grander infrastructure seemed beyond them.

There have been many times during presentations this week when their answers don't fit the questions, and what the Colombian professor in Kirksville said about having to change his logic to talk to them has meant that they really think they are answering the questions directly. The problem for the translator is trying to turn the questions into something that makes sense to them and then turn the answer around to something that makes sense to the listeners. It's not difficult to translate the words coming from both sides but the concepts are much more difficult to translate, especially if they don't match.



Bob/Beto Thatch, Reynelio and Ancisar in front of The Print Shop

A Long-awaited Reunion

By Jonne Long

New Song Church, North Kansas City, MO

Four years ago, CSN member Jonne went on CSN-KC's first delegation to Putumayo to form the sister community relationship. The one-hour small group session and the musical participation of Ancisar and Reynelio during the main worship service were truly high points for both New Song Church and CSN-KC because of the partnership that has formed over the years. Having them walk New Song's rural land, present their story and ideas to New Song members, and play their wonderful music in our sanctuary provided a physical "here and now" perspective to a relationship that previously seemed remote and vague.

Children of God

By Judy Thatch

Same Event, New Song Church

The Sunday School class at New Song church was a nice intimate group in a fairly small room with people sitting around at tables. I thought that perhaps having Ancisar and Reynelio sing a song or two initially might relax them in terms of speaking to a group. That's exactly what we did that morning.

By the time this event occurred, our guests were more used to audiences. On the way to the church I told them about the perspective of the people in this church to give them an idea about this group. Granted I don't actually know much about this church group, but I know some of the people involved in that church and I know their perspectives—after all, I grew up with some of them! I may have mentioned the word "God" but only briefly, and basically told them that these people were socially-minded, and would be receptive to speakers from another country.

I soon began to notice how intelligent these men are because of the introduction they made after singing a couple of songs. They first noted that we are all from one God – they had figured out that they had to fit that in for good rapport with this group. Then they continued to say that there were other smaller gods and mentioned the god of air, the god of water, the god of the trees and I think the god of children. I tried not to laugh and couldn't help but smile at that. They had managed to bring our two spiritual groups together that day!



Reynelio and Ancisar in concert

28 Cents

By *Jonne Long*

Clay-Platte Montessori School children's forum

When I arrived at the Clay-Platte Montessori School, Andrea Scott, an administrator there, greeted me warmly. She said they wanted to give us an honorarium for the program, and asked how should she make out the check. I asked if they wanted a tax exemption, and she indicated yes, so I suggested that she make it out to Colombia Support Network/WICOLA.

Andrea told me the group of children would be larger than she first expected. It turns out some members of another class heard about the presentation and asked if they could come also. She had asked how many children in that class wanted to come, and they all raised their hands! We then had to hold the presentation in a larger space and even required an additional projector. We had it all set up by the time Ancisar and Reynelio arrived. There were about 30 children of various ages and 4 or 5 teacher/administrators in attendance.

Ancisar, ever sensitive to his audience, deftly geared the presentation to the children's level. At one point he had them singing and clapping along with the chorus of the "America" song,

and clapping as he sang the verses as well. Reynelio played and sang a couple of songs as well.

Interesting note: A class of 16-18 younger children with 2 teachers took a break and walked very slowly and quietly 3 times around the space where Ancisar and Reynelio were playing music, then quietly returned to their classroom.

They allowed time for a Q/A at the end, and the children had many good questions, including one about their beadwork. The teachers eagerly agreed to a 10-minute extension of time in order for the Q/A to continue. One of the questions, which I think was asked by Kitty, was "What can we do to help?" Ancisar responded first with "education" - and expounded a bit. Afterward, group photos were taken with Ancisar and Reynelio front and center, surrounded by children.

As the other children were going back to their classes, three boys came over to let Ancisar and Reynelio know they, or at least one of their parents, were from a Latin American country. One of these, Logan Hovey, was especially interested and asked insightful questions. He stayed a little longer to ask a couple more questions, then reached into his pocket and pulled out 28 cents and handed it to me to help with the cause. He said he had \$16 at home

he was willing to give. At that point, Ancisar called Logan over closer and asked him to hold out his arm. Ancisar tied a beaded bracelet on his wrist as a sign of friendship and respect. Logan said he was going to do some research on the computer to find out more about the Embera. I showed him the CSN website on the CSN T-shirt I was wearing.

Andrea told me that she was considering leaving the Montessori school in order to spend more time going to remote villages at various places in the world to train teachers. She has done this some already, and loves it. No community is too primitive, and she is prepared to live in the community for several weeks - her actual training takes 4 weeks, but she wants to get to know the community for a while first. Through Jennifer, she approached Ancisar about the possibility of her coming to our sister communities to train teachers.

The frosting on the cake: when I went outside, Ancisar was sitting in the drivers' seat of Jennifer's car, grinning, while Reynelio took pictures of him from various angles. What fun! (Unfortunately, I had filled my camera card and didn't have space left to snap one of my own.) What a wonderful morning it was!

We thank God, Mother Earth and the spirits of our ancestors for the warm welcome we received and the wonderful time we had, when we met our friends from Kansas City. For us, it was a very enriching life experience. With our own feet, we had tread upon the soil of the United States, experiencing its reality with each step. With our own lungs, we inhaled its air, each breath filled with happiness.

Thank you to the universities that kindly received us and to all the people who made our trip possible. You will be with us always, in our thoughts and in our hearts.

—*Ancisar and Reynelio*

EMBERA VISIT TO TRUMAN UNIVERSITY

*Written by Marc Becker
Professor of History,
Truman State University*

Embera-Chami leaders Ancizar Gutiérrez and Reynelio Yagari spoke about Indigenous rights and the efforts to preserve their traditional way of life to a standing-room only crowd on the Truman State University campus in Kirksville, Missouri, on November 1, 2011.

Gutiérrez and Yagari discussed how their community has sought to survive amidst an ongoing civil war, widespread drug trafficking, and the pressures of industrial development on their lands. They responded to student questions about their culture and religion, and sang traditional Embera-Chami songs.

In addition to the public presentation, Gutiérrez and Yagari spoke to classes and joined students and faculty in a potluck dinner. These encounters provided more relaxed opportunities for exchanging ideas and joining in song.

The visit of the Embera-Chami leaders provided a unique opportunity for students in northeast Missouri to learn first-hand about a South American Indigenous culture. Their visit challenged common stereotypical notions, and provided an opportunity to extend learning opportunities out of the realm of textbooks and into the real world. The conversations expanded student knowledge of outside pressures on traditional societies.

Gutiérrez and Yagari's visit also provided an opportunity for CSN-KC chapter member Rachel Hogan to return copies of Embera-Chami cultural stories to campus that she had translated into English while a student at Truman State University

The Global Issues Colloquium at Truman State University sponsored the talk, together with the Spanish Honorary Society (Sigma Delta Pi), the Multicultural Affairs Center, and the departments of History and Classic and Modern Languages.

The Colombia Support Network

Action on Colombia

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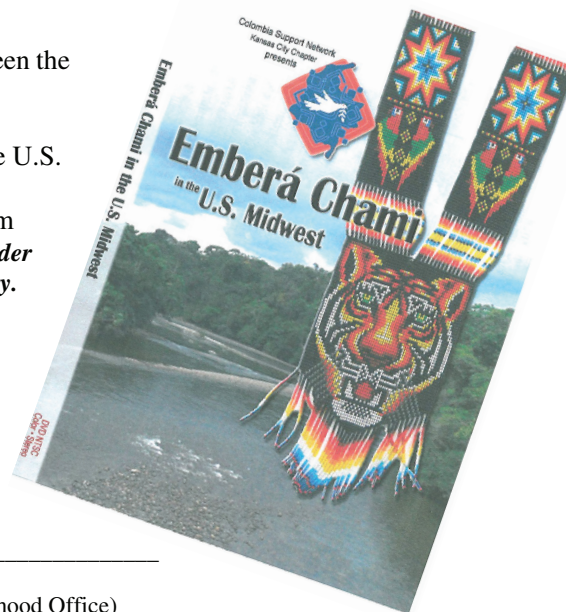
Yes! I would like to support the relationship between the Kansas City CSN Chapter and the Embera Chamí indigenous communities in southern Colombia, by purchasing a DVD of their recent presentation in the U.S. In addition to the main program, the DVD contains an audio copy of their 25-minute radio program from KKFI community radio in Kansas City. **Please consider ordering extra copies for your church, school or library.** Send this order form with payment to:

CSN-Kansas City
3 West 63rd St.
Kansas City, MO 64113

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