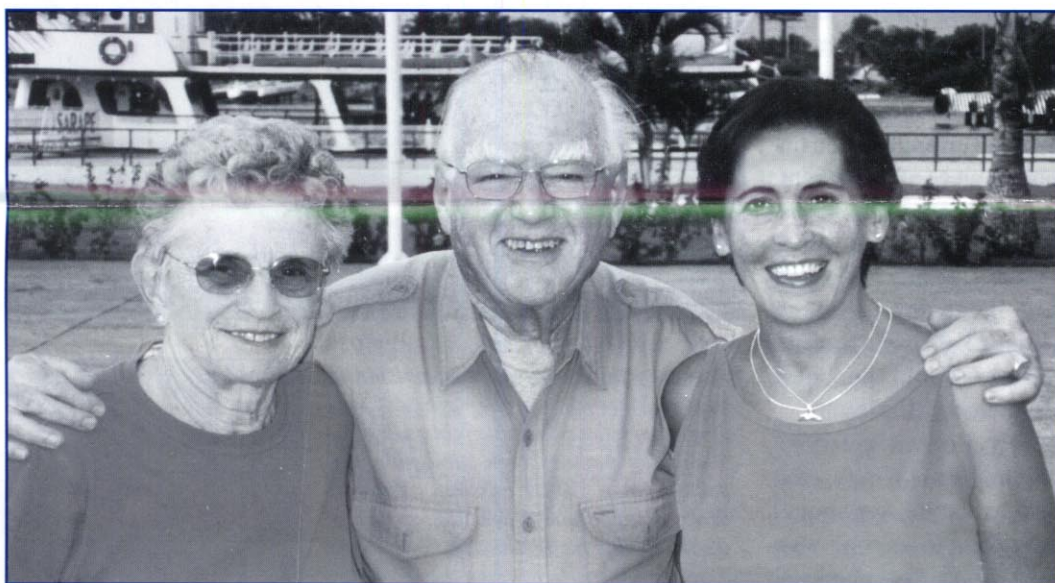


Bring the World into Focus. . . .

VOSH - Indiana ChapterTM

Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity
www.vosh-indiana.org



Shirley and Bob Merriam greet an old friend, Marisa Zaragoza, on a VOSH Mission to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. Marisa was an exchange student who lived with the Merriam's in the 1970's.

Finding Your Passion the Merriam Way

by Joyce Crawley

Bob Merriam spent his career as an Electrical Engineer for General Electric, but he found his passion on a VOSH mission in 1983. Since then, he has led or volunteered for 49 missions to the poor in places the rest of us may consider vacation spots. He's visited Peru; Jamaica; Honduras; Mexico and Ecuador to name a few.

Bob and his wife, Shirley, live in Owensboro, Kentucky. After Bob's first VOSH trip in 1983, Shirley has joined him for most of the rest of the trips.

After his retirement from GE in 1988, he and Shirley became really serious about their passion for travel and for helping the poor to better health. When they don't have a trip of their own planned, they volunteer for

one of Jeff Marshall's or another team's trips.

"We enjoy traveling to new places," Bob says. "When we're not traveling, we're working with the Lions clubs in the area. Shirley does most of our own Rx processing. We have about a 50 mile radius all sewed up for used glasses!"

"My job on missions is to run the Retinomax Autorefractor," Bob said. "But we often work in places with no electricity, and spend long days seeing patients, so the batteries would run down." Bob used his engineering experience to design a system for keeping the batteries charged. He rigged an overnight recharging system that is now considered standard practice on missions. "Another prob-

lem we had that we finally got fixed was to get our own Autorefractor," he said. "We had been renting them for years, but our rental companies disappeared, making it difficult to find one to rent or borrow. I finally suggested to Jeff Marshall that we buy our own. Then I gently pushed and pushed, and then pushed. Jeff finally relented and now we have a VOSH Indiana Retinomax.

In the 1970's, the Merriam's had the pleasure of hosting Marisa Zaragoza, an exchange student from Mexico. They didn't know it at the time, but they would meet again when Marisa volunteered to help on a mission to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico in 2001. She provided translation services and helped out wherever she

Continued from page 1

was needed. They have also been lucky enough to travel with his children and grandchildren on some recent missions, making it a family affair.

There are so many memories from so many trips that it would be hard to choose his favorite, but he does have a favorite story from a South American trip. It seems they were waiting on the banks of the Amazon River for the boat to deliver their glasses. Bob stood watch over the \$10,000 autorefractor, when a dog walked up and heisted his leg on the precious piece of equipment. Bob chased the dog into a bar, where the dog ran behind the accordion player. He yelled at the guy and asked "Do you know your dog just peed on my suitcase?" The accordion player looked up and said "no, but if you hum a few bars, I'll play it"

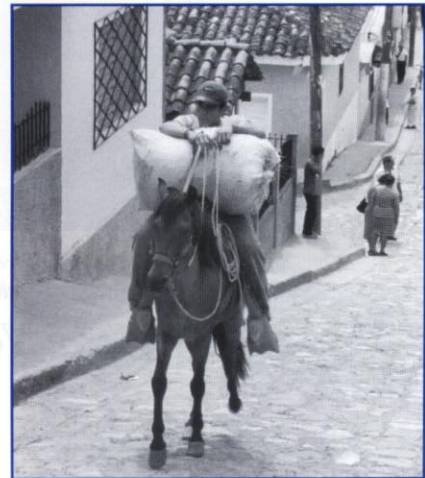
In September, Bob will celebrate his 50th VOSH mission. His passion (and questionable humor - see above) has been contagious to anyone who meets him. Few of us are so lucky.



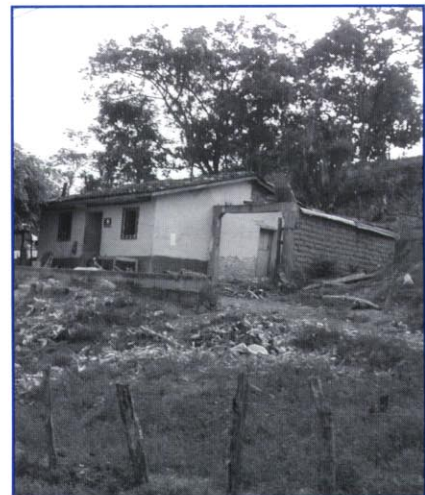
Above, a VOSH volunteer checks vision of a little girl sporting her new glasses. You don't have to be a doctor to join a mission. Many lay people work alongside the doctors on a VOSH mission. Without their participation, much fewer patients would be able to receive care.



The beautiful children of these poor countries may never get healthcare of any type without the caring doctors and volunteers on a VOSH mission.



One of the added benefits of volunteering is seeing the local culture, sometimes almost like stepping back in time.





The Hills of Honduras are Alive with the Sound of Ruth Berkling

by Zabelle D'Amico
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edited for space

Her story reads like a current-day script for "The Sound of Music," but in Ruth Berkling's case, personal tragedy deepened her commitment to a life of service to the people of Honduras.

Even as a child Ruth wanted to help people in other countries. After finishing nursing studies in 1962, she set out on her life journey, traveling initially to southern Germany to work in a clinic. It was there that Ruth met Arnold Berkling, a German businessman who lived in San Pedro Sula, Honduras.

Arnold had returned home in the aftermath of a bad car accident in which he lost his wife and was severely injured. His two young sons, ages three and four, remained with friends in Honduras.

Arnold convinced Ruth to return to Central America with him in order to care for his children.

Ruth arrived in Honduras with a working contract as a governess in 1963. Two years later, Honduras became her permanent home when

she married her boss. The couple celebrated the birth of a daughter in 1972.

Since Arnold Berkling had been a longtime Lions Club member, Ruth found herself happily enmeshed in activities for the poor and sick of this beautiful country. During Easter week, 1978, she and her husband were asked to host a group of VOSH-Indiana optometrists who were conducting a clinic in El Progreso, a small nearby town. As time for their stay drew to an end, the Berkling's asked the VOSH-Indiana team to come back again.

They returned that same October and have been returning at least once, sometimes twice a year, ever since. The team continues to see between 3,000 and 4,000 patients on each mission. Clinic venues change each time in order to help needy people from different areas.

Ruth's role as an in-country liaison has been vital to the ongoing success of the program, although after so many years of working closely with Dr. Jeff Marshall, who coordinates the trips from the states, many of the details no longer need to be discussed. What is shared is talk about family and close friendship, even kinship, as Dr. Marshall is godfather to one of Ruth's grandsons.

The everyday rhythm of Ruth's life was suddenly and severely impacted when Arnold died in a car accident in 1980. The boys were in

Ruth's work brings her into contact with hundreds of people from all over the world. Here, Ruth, (left) discusses the day's work with a VOSH volunteer, on a recent mission.

college by then, but their daughter was only seven.

Rather than pack up and return home, Ruth remained in her adopted country. She was named Honorary Consul for Germany for eight provinces in 1983, a post which she still holds.

Ruth didn't give up her efforts on behalf of the needy in Honduras. She set about forming a charitable foundation, the Fundacion Para Servicios Medicos Voluntarios. (Foundation for Voluntary Medical Services) and pushed for ophthalmological services starting in 1984.

The Fundacion now provides 40 to 50 surgeries annually. Thanks again to her organization's persistent campaigning, there is now a permanent eye clinic in San Pedro Sula that helps needy people with eye problems throughout the year. The two-story building has approximately 2,200 square feet on each floor, with areas for examining, dispensing, prepping, surgery, and post op. Ruth can be found at the clinic six days a week.

"The longer you work with the poor, the more aware you become of the tremendous needs," says Ruth. So, two years ago her Fundacion started yet another clinic, one for general medicine, complete with a drugstore offering basic medications.

"Supposedly public hospitals treat the poor of our country for nothing," says Ruth "but they never have medicine. It is only available at the very private expensive drugstores. Now we are able to supply our patients with diabetes and high blood pressure medicines."

Two years ago the Fundacion was invited to join VOSH-INTERNATIONAL as VOSH-Honduras. Along with her many other duties, Ruth Berkling continues to work hard to keep that relationship strong.

Upcoming Missions

Honduras 2003

February 22 to March 1, 2003

Havana, Cuba

April 26 to 30, 2003

Ecuador

Ambassadors for Children/VOSH Indiana

Late September 2003

Honduras 2004

February 21 to 28, 2004

Kenya 2004

November 20 to December 4, 2004

For more information contact

Dr. Jeff Marshall, 317-357-8534 drjcm@att.net

Membership

Your Opportunity to Help

VOSH-Indiana is a 501(c)-3 corporation, meaning that all contributions are tax-deductible. Our primary source of income is membership dues and contributions. We encourage optometrists to join and help us give this added service as a part of our professional lives. We also welcome other professionals and lay people who share our desire to help those less fortunate obtain better vision care.

VOSH-Indiana dues are \$30 annually. Please send your dues or contributions in the enclosed envelope to VOSH-Indiana, P.O. Box 19028, Indianapolis, IN 46219. Be sure to include your name, address, phone and e-mail if available.

Check it out!

A special thank you to Terri Greene, webmaster for the Indiana University School of Optometry for all the hours of hard work building our website. Visit today at www.VOSH-Indiana.org



You will see wonderful faces like these two lovely ladies when you go on a VOSH mission.



A Mayan monument at the Copan ruins in Honduras.

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