

The Heart of a marriage

(and International Community Development)

By Bob Holmes



Tawa and Laura Saune

Tawa Saune grew up in Lima, Peru. He is Quechua – an indigenous people who descended from the ancient Incas. His father is from the mountains, his mother from the jungle. And Laura, “the girl of his dreams,” is an American from Columbia International University. As husband and wife, they are developing a HEART for the underdeveloped world.



Laura paints a mural on a mission house wall during a trip to Belize.

Tawa and Laura Saune are the first CIU students in a new CIU minor, “International Community Development,” or ICD. An important aspect of ICD is an agreement with the HEART (Hunger Education and Resource Training) Institute, an educational ministry of Warner University, a Christian school in Lake Wales, Florida. HEART operates a village community on the Warner campus that simulates many aspects of underdeveloped world living. The HEART website says that “participants acquire problem solving and coping skills that will enable them to adapt more readily to the challenges they will face overseas.” Tawa and Laura spent their fall semester at HEART, a requirement of the ICD program. They lived in primitive quarters, butchered animals, and learned about sustainable agriculture.

The girl of his dreams

Although they had not met, Laura (23) and Tawa (21) both lived in Lima, Peru, where Laura’s parents served with Wycliffe Bible Translators. One day, Tawa said in an email interview from HEART, he saw her in the jungle and fell in love with her. Unaware of Tawa’s interest, Laura left for Moody Bible College in Chicago.

“After I had started college, I returned to Peru for five months to be with my family,” Laura said. “It was then that I met Tawa. He had become really good friends with my younger brother in my absence.”

Tawa says he was attracted to Laura before he became friends with her brother – even before he realized they were siblings. “One weekend I walked into my best friend’s house, as I did every weekend, and when I looked in the living room, I saw that the girl of my dreams was sitting there, watching TV.” They married in January 2010 and transferred to CIU, where Tawa’s sister and brother-in-law had attended. After reading a description of the program, both became especially interested in the university’s ICD minor.

Florida: Mostly hot with only a chance of privacy

HEART’s location in sub-tropical Florida means that as last semester began, the newlyweds had to endure the heat of the late summer and the chilly mornings of fall while living as they would in an underdeveloped country. “Probably the most difficult thing for me was living with the heat at the beginning of the semester,” Laura said. “We would sweat constantly throughout the day. It was difficult to take a nap or rest during the day because of the heat. We had no heating or AC in our cabins. It was an adjustment not to have electricity.”

For Tawa, the biggest challenge was what he calls one of HEART’s best and most educational features – lack of privacy. “Laura and I had our own cabin, but 90 percent of the time we were surrounded by at least five people, though a lot of the time all 20 students (in the program) were together,” Tawa said. “This was an important aspect of the program, because on the mission field one does not always get to choose who he ministers with. Privacy is thrown out the window.”

The importance of community

For Laura, living in the close community that HEART created had a big impact on her. “In the United States, many people are isolated from other people, causing loneliness and a lack of support,” she said. “I loved being able to walk out of my cabin and find a group of people I knew to talk with and fellowship.”

callings

Tawa was impressed by a trip the HEART students took to the Central American country of Belize to study the community development programs there. “It was inspiring to observe a whole community in Belize benefit from a water distribution and filtration system,” he said. “The missionaries who started the project are HEART graduates. They succeeded in making the project in a way that impacted many needy people, yet in a way that was (inexpensive) enough to be sustainable by the community.”

The HEART experience

Laura and Tawa say the HEART experience was “eye-opening” as they learned to live without, and focus on sustainability, especially in agriculture. “We’ve learned that God desires us to take care of the earth,” Tawa said. “We’ve learned how to maintain the life of the soil in order to prevent land from becoming infertile; how to raise, breed and butcher small animals; (and use) technology in a way that is appropriate, depending on the culture and people. We have to be concerned about the generations that come after us and not use up the available resources.”

What about the gospel?

The question that is often raised by many evangelicals when there is a focus on human need is – how do you merge meeting those needs with the proclamation of the gospel? Laura and Tawa are ready with an answer. Laura points to James 2:16: “If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?”

“We can tell someone about the gospel. But if they are hungry, why should they listen to what we say?” Laura questions. “I think the presentation of the gospel, accompanied by meeting the physical needs of a people, is much more powerful than solely presenting the gospel.”

Tawa knows the power of meeting human needs firsthand. When American medical missionaries came to Peru and met the needs of his people – the Quechua – they started to ask questions. “They asked me, ‘Tawa, why do these Americans who have such a good life in the USA care about us? Why do they sleep in the freezing cold and suffer just so they can give us medical help?’ When I tell them the reason, they understand the love of Christ, because they see it is genuine.”

Future preparation

It is the desire of Laura and Tawa to return to Peru as missionaries one day. They recommend CIU’s International Community Development program and HEART to others, especially couples. “There are so many people who have gone to the mission field and have not succeeded because they were prepared in their minds, but not for the physical aspect of missions,” Tawa said. “HEART stretches people in every way.” **ROC**



Tawa learns to pluck a chicken.

For more on the HEART experience, check out Laura’s blog “Tin Roofs” at: <http://tinroofsvillage.blogspot.com/>.

For details on CIU International Community Development program visit: <http://www.ciu.web/academic-programs/international-community-development-minor>.

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