



# PANAMA *Missionary*

Following...Joy!

By Joy Stuhr

As I sit here at my desk and gaze out the window at palm trees and a tropical blue sky, I am reminded of when I first came to Panama two years ago: I see myself sitting at this desk and staring out the window overlooking the very same street while I composed my first article for the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*. Back then, I was fresh onto the mission field in Panama and filled with memories of my recent experience in Kyrgyzstan. I had no idea what God had in store for me.

Yet as I reflect on all my experiences, I see how Jesus has walked with me in the past, and I know

I can trust Him to be with me as I now prepare to leave Panama.

Looking back on my first year, I struggled with the language and knew nothing of the cul-

ture, Panama City, or mission work. My job description was to bring music to the churches by teaching piano or guitar, but I had no Spanish language resources, no teaching materials, and no instruments! However, everything I needed, my Heavenly Father provided. Through generous individuals, He provided the funds for instruments and teaching materials. Through coincidental meetings, He brought knowledgeable people into my life who taught me what I needed to know. I was amazed at the countless times He reaffirmed His plan for me to be here.

By the end of my first year, the music program had become more established and I felt better adjusted. I agreed to stay for another year. However, my second year brought its own set of struggles: The program was not as novel, so I saw many students come and go; the majority of my students were youth, so I found myself taking on the role of a parent who needed to show tough love to my students. Through these challenges, I saw more opportunities to share God's love as I formed closer relationships with my



students and learned more about them and their own hurts.

The majority of my students came from poor families and broken homes, which left them with many adult responsibilities. I remember hearing one student say that she could not wait until she was 18, so that she could work and care for the family — since her dad was too depressed to do so. Many painful events seemed to take place in my students' lives that second year. One of my students faced the divorce of her parents and the challenge of having to provide for the family; another one lost her grandfather, who was the only male figure in her life; and another faced the abusive past of her childhood. Although at times I felt helpless, the Holy Spirit used me to hear their hurts and dry their tears.

As I struggled with my purpose for being in Panama and the strength of the music program, I thanked God for the valuable relationships that I was able to form with each of my students. I realized that while I had my own plans and objectives in teaching music, the Lord also had His plan to use me in the lives of the students. I have my



with me, providing the peace I need as I make decisions in my life.

When I look back through all my experiences, I can see how Jesus has blessed my life, and I trust His plan for the future. As I sit here at my desk, I ponder the next chapter: “Will I study ethnomusicology in a foreign country? Will I return to church work in the USA? Will I work as a music missionary somewhere in Africa?” Regardless of where I decide to go, I know that Jesus will be with me and bless me.

plans, but He has HIS — and my prayer is that His plans will always prevail!

As I face the end of my second year in Panama, it's time for the next chapter to unfold. While I could stay indefinitely in Panama, I know God is leading me to move on. But as I ask myself the questions, “where, when, how?” I seem to get no answer. At times I feel like Abraham — hearing God's call to move but having no idea where to go. Inside I seem to scream at God, “But I need my PLANS!” Yet He quietly whispers, “Trust me.” I often return to Psalms 32:8 (KJV), “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.” As I consider this verse, I begin to understand that God's plan is for me to live a godly life, regardless of where I am or where I go. God's Word assures me that Jesus is



The story is “to be continued,” but God already knows the ending. In the meantime, I will learn how to trust the Lord with what I know for certain: His plan for my salvation is found in the promises of His Word.

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