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## **Report on use of Scott Kloeck-Jenson International Pre-Dissertation Travel Grant**

From May 24 to June 10, 2004 I, along with my wife and infant daughter, traveled to Manila, Philippines, a trip funded in-part by a Scott Kloeck-Jenson International Pre-Dissertation Travel Grant. Below is a report on how we invested our time and utilized the grant. I would again like to express my gratitude for having the opportunity to receive an SKJ Award. It enabled me to make a life-changing trip and conduct research that will long inform my writing, scholarship, decision-making and even lifestyle. Thank you.

Warm regards,

Mark Kramer

### **Research Report**

In Manila, my aim was simply to learn more about life in an urban squatter community and consider ways of sharing with others the realities of life – the joys and the struggles, the loss and challenges overcome, the hopes and fears, the people and the sites, sounds and smells – in this type of community. We spent the bulk of our time in the Balic-balic railway community in Sampalac district in Metro Manila.

I visited the following agencies:

- **Balic-balic Christian Church:** a church along the railway tracks in Balic-balic. I observed and participated in pre-school activities, evening prayer meetings and other services. This church provided me with most of my neighborhood contacts.
- **Servant Partners:** a church-planting agency that works holistically among the urban poor around the world. I also partnered with this agency; they set us up with housing and logistical needs. I interviewed their staff.
- **Samaritana Transformation Ministries:** a Quezon City-based NGO that helps women living in prostitution to learn skills, leave prostitution, heal and find other means of supporting themselves and their families. I visited the offices, met with staff, participated in an evening group session with women going through the program and then shadowed staff on a night-time outreach to prostitutes working at a transportation hub.
- **Welfareville Bible Church:** a partner church to Balic-balic Christian Church in southern Metro Manila, that provides economic, social and spiritual help to one of the largest squatter areas in Manila. I visited with staff, ate dinner with a squatter family, learned about the neighborhoods, concerns and work being pursued.
- **MMP:** a Filipino agency that sponsors pre-schools, micro-enterprise development and other development efforts. I visited their offices and staff, then toured Payatas, a garbage village,

where people live by sorting through literally mountains of garbage to reuse items or to sell to “junk” or recycling shops. Most garbage sorters live in close proximity to the dump.

In addition to agency visits, I also:

- Conducted and audio-taped 18 interviews, collected qualitative data.
- Visited with community members in Balic-balic in their homes. I decided that this would prove more uniquely informative than trying to visit myriad agencies and NGO workers. Put simply, I tried to spend as much time hanging out with people along the railway as time and culture shock would allow.
- Visited Intramuros, Spanish colonial Manila
- Visited Makati City, Manila’s financial district
- Visited various other places around the city
- Day of rest out of Manila to visit a lake

Most challenging on this trip was learning how to care for our daughter, Nicola, who at the time was five months old. My wife and I will likely live in a development context in the future, though, and this experience helped us ask some good questions and consider the realities of living with children in a difficult place. I also found the interviews difficult to conduct at times simply due to the setting: noisy trains, children under foot, even the constant whirl of electric fans amidst the Manila heat that at times hindered audio-taping. The usual conveniences by which I usually conduct writing and research were absent. While not surprising, this, coupled with language, weather and fatigue challenges, did concern me at times as to whether I was effectively gathering enough information. Upon my return, though, I have become confident in the work we did; at the time, the harried nature of the work simply made discerning “success” impossible in the moment. Having now had time to process, review and transcribe notes and write some, I do believe this was a very successful trip.

My wife, Cynthia, and daughter, Nicola, spent much of their time building relationships with community members and accompanied me for a few agency visits. Cynthia, a professional photographer, shot photos, though she spent much of her time just caring for Nicola. Nicola was very popular among community members. Her presence – many had never seen a white baby before – opened many doors. We also repeatedly ran into racial assumptions regarding white superiority and beauty, particularly in response to Nicola, which was disheartening at times, but this also provided for good conversation and an opportunity for us to encourage those whom we met and insist upon their personal value, capabilities and beauty. (I even had my hair cut for \$.80 by someone who spoke no English (!))

On a final, though somewhat unrelated note, I’m glad to report that my wife and I have decided to financially sponsor a child of a family we met in Balic-balic. Iren, who is four years old, enjoys drawing and does well in pre-school. Through Compassion International, a child- sponsorship program, we will support her with monthly donations, letters and occasional extra gifts until she is 18 years old. And we’ll also be keeping up with her family. My wife and I are grateful that this trip allowed us to take this very tangible step to remain actively involved in this railway community for years to come.