

## Fall of 1995

It was a stormy night. The wind was howling and leaves were flying through the cold air. I let the dogs off the leash and grimly continued my walk. I was finishing up my residency and training as a surgeon.

Since high school my wife and I had been dreaming about living and working in a third world county. As my wife was about to finish her residency in the pediatrics department, it seemed only a matter of time until we would start to realize our vision. With my hands deep in my pocket, I continued walking through the cold night. I felt desperate and sullen, which seemed to be perfectly in line with the bleak weather.

Although everything had gone smoothly career-wise, there was one thing I had not been able to resolve, God. As a medical doctor, I had to deal with death on a daily basis, especially in South Africa where many of my patients had died. Was there a life after death? Were the words of Christ, which I had known since childhood really true or just words of solace? As I was walking, I became more and more agitated until I finally screamed into the dark night: God where are you? I want to see you?

## Impossible in Human Terms

The longing for a personal relationship with God has never left me. I enjoyed reading about how other people had encountered God. At the same time, I analyzed and reflected on my own life. When Tina and I were finally done with our residencies, which included stints in England, the US, South Africa and Germany, it was clear to us that a higher being had led us from one cross roads to the next. With a faith as small as a mustard seed, we applied to a missionary hospital in Ecuador. In our application, we stressed that we considered ourselves first and foremost doctors with our Christian faith coming in a distant second.

Tina and I spent five years at the Hospital Vozandes del Oriente in Ecuador, which proved to be a time that would define our lives. We learned what it was like to run a missionary hospital in constant need of funding and with outdated equipment. What we also realized was the fact that a hospital that is in need of funding will ultimately turn into a hospital for the middle class rather than the poor. Every indigenous person we had to turn away left us with a gnawing feeling that this was not right. Neither Tina nor I wanted to devote our lives to the well-being of the rich. We felt called to help the Quechua Indians of the Peruvian Andes, whose fate had deeply moved us on a previous trip to Peru.

In January 2002, Tina and I started to develop our blue print for a new hospital. Our hospital would serve the poorest of the poor and provide them with the highest standard of medical care. We quickly came to realize that such a project would cost millions of dollars. We figured it would require about 1000 supporters, 30 volunteers as well as donations from numerous healthcare and medical companies.

It seemed crazy to launch our initiative in Germany in 2002, when Germany was going through tough economic times. We drove up and down the country on the Autobahn, and wherever there was an opportunity, we introduced people to our vision. That year, Tina hand wrote about 1000 letters to find supporters for our project. By June 2004, we had received a mere 251 donations. It seemed as if we had reached a dead end. But we didn't give up; we truly believed that it was God's plan for us to build a hospital for the Quechuas in Peru.

## God Takes Charge

The name we chose for our hospital was “Diospi Suyana” which means “ We Trust In God” in Quechua, the language spoken by the old Incas. It turned out to be the perfect name – as we found out later, God was lining people up to help us realize our plan.

We had always hoped to find a construction engineer that would manage the hospital construction as a partner. We were looking for a person with significant experience who would be willing to volunteer their time. Unfortunately, we hadn’t been able to find anybody fitting that job description.

On February 16, 2005, I met with our lawyer in Germany, discussing our negotiations with the construction company Constructec. The construction estimates were coming in at about 4 million dollars, not including any medical equipment.

All of a sudden, our lawyer said: “I know somebody who fits your job description.” “Who?” I asked immediately. His answer: “Udo Klemenz.” I called him immediately. “Mr. Klemenz, your name came up two minutes ago, my wife and I are doctors and we want to build a hospital in Peru. Would you be interested to lead this construction project for us on a voluntary basis?” Mr Klemenz and I decided to continue our conversation that evening in person. What we didn’t know was that Udo Klemenz and his wife Barbara had been praying for a “special assignment”. And in August 2005, the couple arrived in Peru to oversee the construction of not only the hospital but eventually also the dental clinic and children’s house. The crown jewel however is our current construction project: the Diospi Suyana school, designed to offer about 500 Quechua children an excellent education.

The hospital construction never had a fixed budget, yet we were able to proceed without incurring any debt or loans. Financially, we never knew what the next day would bring but so far we’ve always received the necessary funding although sometimes at the very last minute.

Nevertheless there were challenges: We didn’t have a reliable internet connection or mobile phone service while the nine local pay phones hardly worked. We also received our share of bad news. On December 17, 2005, for example, customs officials at the Lima airport confiscated my projector. I had forgotten to declare the equipment in one of the customs forms. Even though I had quite a few high-ranking people, including the German ambassador, advocate for me, I didn’t get my projector back. Extremely frustrated, I finally set out to buy a new projector. On February 10th, 2006, I was standing in a small store in Lima, testing various projectors by clicking through my slides about Diospi Suyana. Unbeknownst to me, the president of the Peruvian telecommunications company Impsat-Peru was standing right behind me, watching the presentation intently. He was so moved that he asked for an immediate meeting. As a result, he had Impsat-Peru donate a satellite dish, providing access to several phone lines and internet connections. The value of this incredibly generous donation: \$50,000 annually.

Some of difficulties we faced were frightening. In June 2006, the Peruvian Ministerio de Cultura (Ministry of Culture) enforced an immediate halt to construction, claiming that we hadn’t obtained all the required licenses. The penalty was set at \$700,000, a sum that could have put the whole Diospi Suyana organization under. I asked the German ambassador Roland Kliesow whether he could arrange a meeting with the newly elected President of Peru, Alan García, or his wife Pilar Nores de García. The ambassador thought this overly ambitious given that Alan García’s had just won the election. But God intervened. Through mysterious ways, my wife and I received an invitation to the office of Mrs Nores in July. By the time, our 70-minute presentation about Diospi Suyana was over, the Peruvian First Lady had decided to become our sponsor. And as soon as this news became public, the Ministry of Culture withdrew all their charges against our organization.

## August 31, 2007

It was an impressive backdrop. Four and half thousand people impatiently waiting in the amphitheater next to the Diospi Suyana hospital. A full theater, a big building complex and behind them the giant snow-covered mountains. Tina's and my dream of building a modern missionary hospital had become a reality. I got up and went to the mic to give the opening ceremony speech. I finished my short, 10-minute speech by proclaiming that only God can create something out of nothing. All glory is due to the Lord.

## A Place for the Hopeless

The hospital has been in operation since October 2007. By February 2019, we had registered more than 330,000 patient visits. Our patients are not just a number in our data base; they are fellow human beings from Southern Peru who come to the hospital in hope of treatment or healing of their ailments. In our morning service, our patients can learn that God loves them and that the existence of this hospital is proof that God truly exists. Our hospital is one of the best hospitals in the country, comparable with a medium size first world hospital. We have 160 people on staff and all of them are committed to making the mission that is listed on the sign in our driveway a reality: A hospital that passes on the love of Jesus. Diospi Suyana has changed us - my wife and I consider ourselves first and foremost Christians, our profession is coming in a distant second.

## The Book

The 15 people sitting in a meeting room at the German publishing house "Brunnen Verlag" on September 17, 2009, were stuck. What should they call my book about our journey with God. Maybe "Miracle in Peru" or "Hospital of Faith"? Nobody had a catchy idea. I said a quiet prayer and then said: When I wrote this book, I thought the title should express exactly what I want the message of this book to be: "I have seen God."

## The Story Continues

The construction of the mission hospital was the first major objective of Diospi Suyana. June 24, 2010 then saw the inauguration of the **Dental and Eye Clinics** and April 2012 the completion of the **Children's House for the Diospi Suyana Kids' Clubs**. On March 14, 2014 we dedicated the **Diospi Suyana School**, which together with the Kindergarten will stimulate the development of up to 650 children. We are grateful to have Christian Bigalke, who will make a very competent school principal. As the most recent highlight we opened our media center on August 31, 2016 that will offer a quality radio and TV programme to the south of Peru. We do not know what highs and lows Diospi Suyana will have to go through in future but we place our lives and and our lives' work in God's hands.

## Words of Thanks

At the heart of Diospi Suyana is its staff. They have come from 17 different countries - doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers and technicians are investing their best years for God and their neighbour.

Our heartfelt thanks are due to them. Olaf Böttger, President of Diospi Suyana, has done an invaluable work since the beginning. Day in, day out he serves in the background in an immeasurable capacity. Our thanks go to supporters and friends all over the world. Up to february of 2021, 150,000 individuals and 230 companies had donated over \$35 million.

In the New Testament Paul writes *“But God can do much more than we could ever ask or imagine. Such is the power that is at work in us.”* We have seen the truth of these words over and over again at Diospi Suyana and we thank God for His faithfulness and goodness. Johannes Sebastian Bach wrote an abbreviation under each of his compositions : s d g. It stands for **sol**i **de**o **gl**oria and means *“To God alone be the Glory!”*

Yours Martina and Klaus-Dieter John