

lives changing.

STUDENT MISSIONS
AT SOUTHERN

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Perspectives

Every year, as student missionaries return home and a new cohort goes out, a few missionaries choose to extend their stay for another year. In an effort to gain some perspective on the lives of student missionaries at different stages in their experiences, we interviewed two Southern students currently serving: one who recently extended her stay for a third year and another who had only been in her location for three weeks at the time of the interview. Read their stories on the following pages.



"These people are like family," says Lucia Hudgins.

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FAITH. SURRENDER. JOURNEY. PURPOSE. JOY.



INTERVIEW:

LUCIA HUDGINS

Lucia Hudgins is a student missionary serving her third year at Familia Feliz, an orphanage in Bolivia, South America. She is working on a major in social work.

Mason Clark: Why did you choose Familia Feliz?

Lucia Hudgins: I was positive that the doors wouldn't open for me to be a missionary and that I was too late. I didn't even sign up until after school had ended. But the Student Missions director said, "Nope, Bolivia is wide open. You're welcome to go there, and we actually need you, because only two other student missionaries are going." So the doors just opened really quickly. I told God, "I'm just going to take this leap of faith and follow you." Based on my personal background and story, I thought I could relate to the kids. I thought maybe this was a chance to grow, heal, learn more about God, and give back to the kids in the way God has given to me.

MC: What is your job at Familia Feliz?

LH: My job is being a teacher and house parent for the kids. In addition, we do work supervision, so I'm in charge of a cleaning crew. I also am in charge of activities, with graduation and some other events to plan.

MC: What made you want to be a student missionary?

LH: I've seen how much [God] loves me and how much He works in my life. I want to be able to serve others, and I've always had that desire to show them that they can find hope. I feel like the desire to go and serve has always been a part of me, and it worked out that I was able to

do that here.

MC: What is one experience that stands out from your time in Bolivia?

LH: I remember one night when I heard the life stories of two of the girls. Afterward, I just felt really heavy and overwhelmed. So, once I got the girls tucked in, I walked outside and the stars were covering the sky. I stood there and just started sobbing. After I prayed my heart out and the tears slowed down a little bit, I looked up at the sky and I just saw those stars. In the quietness, it was as if God spoke to me: "Lucia, how many times have I cried over you in that same way? How many times were you sobbing, feeling alone, and trying to put on a tough face? How many times have I yearned for you to know the very same thing that





1: Lucia with members of the first graduating class from Familia Feliz. **2:** Lucia (in red) both teaches and works with her girls.

you want these girls to know—that you're loved and special and worth it just the way you are." In that moment, I felt a little bit of how much God loves me. That is a night I will never forget. That's part of the reason why I have stayed as long as I have. God has been able to work on these girls through me, while at the same time He has used these girls to minister to me.

MC: What keeps you at Familia Feliz?

LH: The main thing would be the kids—being able to connect with them and build these relationships. It isn't just a teacher-student relationship. These people are like family. We've been able to learn a lot from one another. It's just an honor to see these kids grow up."

MC: How long will you stay?

LH: If I stay one more year, I can get my residency and leave the country for up to two years to finish my studies. So that is one option: stay another year, get residency, and go back to school. Honestly, I see myself coming back here after I finish.

MC: What advice would you give to a prospective student missionary?

LH: Take this opportunity to learn more about yourself and God. This kind of work tests your faith, and it isn't always easy. Another thing is just to take it one day at a time. New things can be overwhelming. It's a lot to take on, so don't feel like you have to know everything from day one. It will come with time, so be patient with yourself.

MC: Do you have any favorite foods or traditions that you did not have at home?

LH: Well, I would say my love for rice and eggs has grown stronger. I always liked it at home, but we never ate it every single day like we do here. I haven't gotten tired of it, though. I go to town on my day off, and I still order rice and eggs. I also like washing my clothes by hand. I find it very relaxing.

MC: How have you seen God working in your experience?

LH: He's just used so many kids and their experiences to help me learn to see my worth in God, encourage me to continue in my life, and believe that God truly does have a purpose in my life. My whole experience here has helped me to grow as a person and learn how to see myself



INTERVIEW:

AMBER LEE

Amber Lee is a senior chemistry major serving at the Kuda Vana orphanage in Zimbabwe, Africa. At the time of this interview, she had been in Zimbabwe for only three weeks.

Mason Clark: Why did you choose Kuda Vana in Zimbabwe?

Amber Lee: I was open to go anywhere the Lord called me, but of course, I had some preferences. For some reason, I never had the urge of going to the islands. South America sounded awesome, except that I'm terrible at learning languages. I knew I always wanted to go to an orphanage but didn't know where. When I was looking on the calls list, I saw Kuda Vana and instantly knew this was the one.

MC: What is your job at Kuda Vana?

AL: My job description is vague. I'm a teacher's assistant for grades 3-7 right now. I'm here to help in any and every way I can. It just so happened that they needed extra help at school. My job description could change tomorrow, but

that's the fun in it. Just being open and flexible for God to use you in any way is what it's about.

MC: What made you want to be a student missionary?

AL: The importance of service has always been a big part of my life. The desire to be a student missionary specifically started in the fourth grade. I remember hearing about a college student going away to be a missionary and how it changed his life. I know that fourth grade sounds extremely young, but that's when this dream started. Being here is completely surreal, and I can actually say dreams do come true.

MC: Have you had any notable new experiences?

AL: We all went to walk to the dam

for a Sabbath activity. I was with about five kids while they were picking some berry-looking things. They told me that the berries taste like sugar and to try one. It tasted like ink. There were about three other berry-type things the kids had me try. One was sour, another bitter, and one just not edible. These kids put anything in their mouths. When we were almost back home, they took a chunk of what looked like dried sand off the bark of a tree. They would stick their tongues on a handful and eat it. They said: "Auntie Amber! Try this! It tastes like sugar!" Knowing that their definition of sugar was different than mine, I hesitated. It looked like sand, but these kids were eating so much of it so quickly that I decided it couldn't have been. So, of course, I took some and ate it. IT WAS ACTUAL SAND! I was crunching on rocks and grits of sand. They say it tastes good, but I don't think I'll be needing to try it again.



2



3

1: Curious students ask Amber questions. **2:** Study hall is held in one of the classrooms at Kuda Vana.

3: Kids from Kuda Vana packed into the car for a Sabbath outing.

MC: What will take some getting used to?

AL: The heat. Seasons are opposite of home, so summer is slowly coming. Apparently, it's going to get way worse. It's going to average around 100 degrees and can get up to 130 degrees, so that'll be fun.

MC: Is there anything you have already grown accustomed to?

AL: The electricity. The economy is really bad here, and the government controls when we get electricity. It usually comes on around 8 p.m. and turns off at 5 a.m., but that's a bold approximation. It varies so much throughout the day. It's hard to call friends and family back home, because the WiFi will shut off in the

middle of a conversation. I've had only three conversations without being cut off. It's not uncommon to eat dinner in the dark, have the fridge run only periodically, or have power outages that last a couple of days. I've gotten used to waking up when the sun goes up and heading to bed when the sun goes down.

MC: What is the food like?

AL: It's pretty bland. Everything has a neutral flavor. If anything, some things are salty, but they don't eat anything spicy. I love eating with the kids, because everything is eaten with your hands. Their staple foods are sudza (made out of maize, looks like porridge but has gelatin to hold its shape), rice, beans, and chunks (dehydrated veggie meat made from soybeans).

MC: Have you seen God working in your experience even this early?

AL: Absolutely! I knew that if I was open to God during this experience, it would be life-changing. What I didn't know is that He would be working in my life so soon. I'm so thankful for this opportunity to be constantly reminded to love and serve others. I'm learning that there are a lot of distractions in the world and things we prioritize more than we should. Being away from home and all of those distractions is helping me to think about what's truly important in life. All we need to do is love others. I pray God works in my life to continue prioritizing what really matters. Rather than focusing on yourself, focus on others. But most importantly, focus on Him. ■



If you have stories from your Southern student missionary experience, we'd love to hear them! Email your story to studentmissions@southern.edu

Impact 10-40

A main focus of the Student Missions department is the 10-40 window. Situated between the 10-degrees and 40-degrees north latitude lines, this region contains the poorest of the world's population and an overwhelming percentage of "unreached people groups" (UPGs). We are working to increase awareness and interest among prospective missionaries in this spiritually hungry region, which encompasses part of Africa, almost all of Asia, and roughly two-thirds of the globe's population. Matthew 24:14 compels us to make this area a priority despite a lack of substantial church presence. By partnering with organizations such as Adventist Frontier Missions and Child Impact International, we hope to make a difference and see Jesus come soon.

5.11 billion
TOTAL POPULATION

3.10 billion
TOTAL UNREACHED POPULATION

MAJOR RELIGIONS:

- Islam**
- Hinduism**
- Buddhism**

97%

PERCENTAGE OF UPGs
WORLDWIDE LIVING IN
THIS REGION

11

NUMBER OF SOUTHERN
STUDENT MISSIONARIES
CURRENTLY SERVING IN
THE REGION



Traditions

Serving as a student missionary exposes you to an entirely new culture. See how birthdays were celebrated in the locations of these returned student missionaries.



“The birthday person has to feed a bite of cake to every person at the party!”
- Sydney Blackburn (undisclosed country in Asia)



“The kids loved birthdays. They would throw you into the river and then cover you in eggs and flour. The director would make pizza for birthdays.” - Seth Bermudez (Bolivia)



“Close friends would dump water on the birthday boy/girl, and then everyone around would throw handfuls of dirt and sand on them.” - John Boone (Malawi)



“Everyone got together for a huge dinner with a special cake, sweet spaghetti, and ice cream sandwiches (with actual bread).” - Victoria Hansbury (Philippines)



“You wear handmade flower crowns, and they throw buckets of water and flowers at you throughout the day. Some of the big boys cooked egg rolls for me, and we had a special dinner. We had the girls over for worship and made pancakes and lit candles. Also, some girls took me to the waterfall and pushed me in.” - Hannah Wilson (undisclosed country in Asia)



“My fellow [student missionary] made a video that had all of my friends from around the world wishing me a happy birthday! Then we had a potluck and casual party at my principal’s house.”
- Casey Goldring (Hawaii)



“On a birthday, family and friends come together to celebrate. Everyone gets to eat, and the ladies come and dance for the birthday person to traditional music. Then they pass a bowl around, giving various amounts of money. They also give presents and ice cream and laugh and socialize.” - Nathan Batchelor (Majuro)



“They eat seaweed soup.”
- Annie Jeong (South Korea)

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faith

that we may devote ourselves entirely to Christ

surrender

that we may build trust in the limitless Savior

journey

that we may experience the adventure
of following Jesus

purpose

that we may live out God's calling

joy

that we may live more abundantly
as we share Life with others



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