

## **Distributing Urantia Books: Journey to Latin America**

by Norman Ingram, Whittier, CA and Polly Friedman, Calabasas, CA

On May 21st, 1996, Polly Friedman spent an afternoon chatting with Norman Ingram, a reader from Molokai, residing in southern California until departing for Africa and China. Norman had recently returned to Los Angeles after nearly 24 months sojourning in Mexico, Central and South America.

*Welcome back Norman. I guess the first question to ask is why did you go to Latin America?*

Well, in 1995 I went from Hawaii to New York for a summer session Urantia Workshop. I met Señora Lourdes Pizarro who said she knew of an attorney from Peru who had a study group in Arequipa. I was surprised because I knew there were study groups in Bogota and Santiago. She continued by saying it was a large group of around one hundred, but the amazing thing was they had only one Urantia Book. This put a burden on my heart, or for want of better words, on the top of my prayer list for books for this study group.

A few months later I was in Chicago helping with the Whole Life Expo. I hadn't darkened the door of 533 Diversey Parkway in about 15 years, so I went in and said, "Aloha, I'm Norman Ingram from Molokai, Hawaii and I would like to place an order for one hundred Spanish translation books "El libro de Urantia". Well, there was a sudden tension in the room. They said, "How did you know we had Spanish books?" I said that I didn't know they didn't have them, but I had a need for them in Peru. We all had a good laugh and they said they didn't know the books were coming but there was a truck sitting outside with 5,000 books and no one to unload this first load of second edition softcover Spanish translations. I rolled up my sleeves and said, "Let's get them unloaded." And everything with the Foundation has worked fine ever since.

At any rate, on October 24th, 1995, I left with the few books I could afford in hand for Peru. Five people from four different study groups in Southern California joined with me (they were also going to Peru for an International Conference: Duane Faw, Richard Omura, Stella Religa, John Mahaffey and Sandy Varga. We proceeded to Lima and met a Chilean student named Pradhana Fuchs. After our introduction he asked, "What are you doing here?" I said, "We are delivering some needed Urantia Books to Peru." Well, his eyes got real big and he said, "Urantia! I've been looking for this book for my spiritual progress." Pradhana had been reading the book by J.J. Benitez, called The Trojan Horse (a best seller in Latin America). In that book the author captures the crucifixion of Christ from The Urantia Book.

A friend had told Pradhana that Benitez got his information from The Urantia Book which is very expensive and hard to get. I said, "Un momento", and I went upstairs and brought down an "El Libro de Urantia" and gave it to him. He got so excited his knees buckled. As a result of this meeting we spent two months in 1995 traveling "the Urantia Trail" together in South America going from Lima, to Equador, to Columbia, to Brazil, and up the Amazon River to Iquitos, Peru and onto Chile. Then friends flew Pradhana up for the Flagstaff conference in August 1996 for his contribution to the world outreach of Urantia Nations, S.A. Shortly after the conference we drove back to South America via Mexico and Central America for the big trip to go to each nation's capital city, to the national libraries (biblioteca), universities and prisons.

We did manage to set up a book distributor in Lima and make contact with some book stores along the way as well as a book order of ten to the student book store at the University of Equador in Quito.

*How many books do you think you placed?*

Well, all in all, 184 books were contributed to the Latin American outreach. We want to give our humble thanks to Fred Harris and all the friends who responded through the Internet, readers at large from the Fellowship and the Foundation's contribution of ten books and air freight to the different shipping destinations. You can all be proud of your cooperative efforts. The Kingdom is being built in the hearts of men and women.

*How were you personally supported during this time:? It must have been very expensive.*

We got very little help but it seems like it was a step of faith. We didn't have the funds when we started out to do it, but we were given the burden to reach the South American continent. It seems like every place we went we were taken care of beyond what we could imagine. Remember, when the apostles first went out they were told not to take extra food or clothes with them because things would work out? And it did the same for us.

*What transportation and route did you take?*

We drove a donated RV nicknamed "Norla" (Norlatiadek) from Los Angeles to Phoenix, to Laredo, Texas and then we passed through Monterey, Guadalajara, San Miquel de Allende, Mexico City, Oaxaca and Chiapas. Then we headed to Central America, going through Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. We left "Norla" in Costa Rica because we didn't have the funds to ship the RV all the way to Peru and the ferry from Panama to Columbia had gone out of service. From Costa Rica we bussed to Panama, then flew to Bogota, Colombia, and then to Lima and Cuzco in Peru. We rode the train past Lake Titicaca to La Paz, Bolivia. From Bolivia we took a bus to Santiago, Chile.

*What highlights or jubilees did you experience?*

There were so many. One highlight happened one evening in San Miquel de Allende. Pradhana was sitting by himself on a park bench when a young man came down and sat next to him. Pradhana motioned us over to them and we were introduced to "Seraphim." I had never met a Seraphim before. Needless to say, that turned out to be quite a night. We turned on a little love to this young man and he stuck to us like glue and followed us back to the RV. There, we read to him about seraphim, and he was delighted. We watched this Seraphim as he had a spiritual birthday. He wanted to take us to his father's ranch but we couldn't accept all the invitations we got, or we would still be there.

*What about highlights in South America?*

Again, there were so many. While in Santiago we met a fellow who was a co-owner of a TV video editing studio. He asked a question about life after death. I was explaining to him about the journey to Paradise, and we had gone past the local system and on the constellations, when he looked at me, and with a big smile as if a burden had been lifted off his shoulders, and said, "Happy Birthday!"

All the questions and burdens he had before were lifted, and he was on the way to Paradise. He was having a spiritual birthday on the spot, like our friend Seraphim did.

*And you also went to prisons?*

Yes, and it was always a blessing to go to prisons. Our first experience was in Guadalajara, Mexico. There were 30 inmates that sat down to see our little introduction of the Adoration video, which we always showed first. There was one boastful young prisoner who wouldn't settle down and was making fun of our work. Finally the other prisoners made him quiet down to see the slide show and he was the first one to stand up after a few minutes to say, "I think I got a glimpse of what heaven must be like." He got the message for sure, as did his fellow inmates.

*What happened in difficult places like Colombia?*

As far as turmoil, it seems there was something happening in most places. Like in Chiapas, Mexico, it was the Indians. Then we crossed over to Guatemala, and shortly after that people were calling with concern about the deaths at a soccer game, which we didn't happen to attend. When we arrived in Columbia they were observing the 10th anniversary of the bombing of government buildings that were overtaken by mountain rebels. They were afraid that violence might happen again, so you saw only men in suits and the military and police on the street of Bogota.

We were in Lima when rebels took over the Japanese embassy. In Chile four prisoners were airlifted by helicopter from the new multi-million dollar prison that was thought to be escape proof. It seems everywhere we went things were politically active, but we weren't affected by any of it.

*Did you have any disappointments?*

They are so minor compared to the blessings that's its hardly worth mentioning. In South America, Latinos especially are reaching outside their church. They are tired and unhappy with the mysteries. They want more answers and they're latching onto every new age thing that comes down the pike. L. Ron Hubbard is out in full force with Dianetics, the Mormons are out in full force with their missionaries; the 7th Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses and the rest, are all there because it gets them out of the unfulfilling experience they've been having with their churches and lack of spiritual growth. If I can show my brothers a more direct path -- the journey to Paradise -- I feel it's my first duty in life.

*How much influence have the Benitez books had on paving the way for the Urantia teachings?*

We talk about the help we get from the Foundation and a little from the Fellowship, but Benitez has probably been our biggest helper in all South America. When you say Urantia, you might get a puzzled look, but when you say J. J. Benitez, you have them right back in the conversation. When they find out a lot of the material from the Benitez books came from The Urantia Book, they want this also for spiritual insight so it's been a great help to us in many ways.

*What do you feel comes now? What's the next step? What can we do to help this cause?*

First, let me recap what we've accomplished. In Latin America and Mexico there are over 38 municipal and national libraries, 20 plus universities and 14 prisons that have The Urantia Book on the shelf. We delivered over 184 books and spoke to over 500 people in 24 months. With all of your help and the help of the powers that be, we were able to plant some seeds.

But after reading The Urantia Book I realize it is just as important to nurture these seeds that have been planted. We have a database list of people who want more information and fellowship. They want more visitors from America. They love the fact that people in America love them and are willing to share these marvelous truths with them.

*In time, do you think it will be helpful to develop study aids that could be sent to new study groups?*

Most definitely, and some of that is being translated and sent already. Many of the secondary works have been translated and many more need to happen. In fact, we are looking for volunteers to join the translation team to translate articles and quarterly newsletters into Spanish. I've never seen such an enthusiastic bunch of people, especially young people of South America under the age of 26. They are picking up The Urantia Book and getting so excited and telling their friends about it. The Urantia Book tells us that when you take a big step forward for truth, beauty, and goodness, you can change the world. I think South America is going to be a prime example of how things can turn around in a shorter period of time.

*Do any of these folks talk about coming to America?*

Yes, about a half dozen people from a Mapuche study group and the same number from Santiago, want to come to the IC99 Conference. Two new young readers from Uruguay will be here in June and we may take them to the Vancouver, B. C. conference. Pradhana will be flying into LAX from time to time to fellowship, (he is a flight attendant with Lanchile Airlines.)

*What country has the most study groups?*

Well, I can say there's been about 2,000 books sold in Bogota. There are five to six very good study groups in Colombia and some of the study groups are very strict in their teachings, so the students really learn the material. A lot of those groups are breaking up now to form new study groups from the result of a very thorough training of teachers. There are at least three groups in Chile, one in the north and two in Santiago. And there are a lot of readers at large in South America that don't know each other.

But, at least this little mission brought several readers together. I understand the newest outpost study group has started on Isla Robinson Crusoe, thanks to Pete Niada, Sebastian Solar, and Guido Balbontin. Over 52 books were given to new young readers in Chile alone. In their appreciation, the Mapuche study

group has made a video "Adoracion" as an introduction to *El Libro de Urantia*, Chilean style. It is available in Spanish, Portuguese, French, and English. Georges DuPont got the first complimentary copy for his approval.

*Many thanks and blessings, Norman. You are truly a trail blazer, and have brought riches to many by your action, example and love for humanity.*