

I anxiously await my plane that will whisk me back home where my safe little cocoon awaits me. My world is safely sealed with screens and pest control, hospitals that cure all, insurance policies that fix everything. My imaginary world allows me to slip into my crisp clean sheets at night and sleep like a baby.

I made this trip to Bolivia not to serve but to visit my daughter and her family (My daughter, Katie, began working for Etta Projects in March of 2009). The visit included some of the typical events – dinner with friends, shopping and seeing the sights. There were also the atypical events – the request to teach a baking class, joining the group in a visit to a rural community that needed information about water systems, health, and hygiene. Then there were frustrating visits to different departments trying to coordinate projects so that they actually come to fruition.

Now I consider myself a good person. I don't walk pass people asking for a hand without dropping them a coin or lifting a load. I write checks of donation to the select organizations I support. But who the hell are these people that live outside their comfort zone and search out those in need? People who look for ways to help so that it is not about them but about empowering the communities of achieve on their own.

Pennye Nixon-West is that kind of person. She is a mother as I am a mother, but that is where the similarity ends. When she lost her daughter Etta in a terrible accident here in Bolivia, she did not close a part of her soul and retreat to the safety of her sorrow. She allowed the essence of Etta to grow within her soul. She turned her lost into hope and founded Etta Projects. Fierce and often outrageous she fights for the funding of projects and for the people that have learned t except less then they deserve.

I saw the villages that have yet to get a water system. While the people were wonderful, my hygiene and safety alarm went into overdrive. I was doing a count down on how soon we would be able to leave. Then we went to a village where Etta Projects had already successfully brought fresh clean water to each home. The small school had bathrooms as well. My heart celebrated their achievement. It was like a different world. But it didn't just happen. It took education, government support, community involvement, and coordination. And as we all know change always involves stumbling blocks and setbacks. The kind of things that make someone like me throw up their hands and say, "Oh well, I tried." But for Pennye and her crew they persist. Completed water systems that don't work put fire in Penney's eyes as she asked the company, "Would you accept this in your home because I wouldn't and if it is not good enough for us it is not good enough for anyone. FIX IT!" And they did and now it works.

I was brought to a newly formed bakery. Women from a small village wanted something better in their lives. Etta Projects offered small business courses, bakery training, and funding. The women brought commitment and the willingness to work hard. The end result - success. The village has fresh baked breads. The bakery is thriving and a portion of the funding will be repaid in order to help fund new projects down the road.

These people and the people they serve touch and inspire me. But can they change me? What makes me the kind of person that sorts through the paper money to get to the coins in my giving while a poor village family with nothing offers us whatever they have in order to honor us as guests? As you read this do you see yourself more like Penny and her staff or do you see yourself more like me, not ready to leave the cocoon but certainly wanting to do something outside the comfort zone. Search your talents because the need is great. Can you offer educational ideas, money, or fundraising capabilities? Maybe you are feeling adventurous and want to come down and do some hands on support.

Etta does sustainable development. They educate, coordinate, and fund projects. They build relationships and offer people that expect nothing, basic things. Things we take for granted - clean water, opportunity to make a living, and understanding of what is needed to sustain a healthy body. Etta Project's resources influence what they are able to offer rural Bolivian communities. **People like you and I influence Etta Project's resource.**