

The experiences of Steven Dickens thus far

American Cooperative School

Paramaribo, Suriname



Paramaribo, Suriname

Suriname is located on the southern edge of the Caribbean Sea. It lies in the tropical zone but has the advantages of the sea breezes to temper the climate. The southern part of Suriname extends into Amazonia. The coastal region is the result of alluvial deposits swept from the Amazon River by the Guyana current. The shoreline, home to the giant green turtles, is mostly mud flats and mangroves. Most of the country is covered by rainforests, which are accessible by riverboat or air. It is located in one of the most meteorological and seismological stable locations in the world – no hurricanes or earthquakes.

Suriname was a Dutch colony from the 1663 when it was part of the Treaty of Ghent settlement with the British. The Dutch traded Manhattan for Suriname. In the 1950's it received commonwealth status. It gained its independence in 1975. After a military coup on February 25, 1980, there was military rule until November 25, 1987. Currently, the democratically elected government has been taking steps to boost the economy of the country.

The economic downturn had its advantages in that the instability of the government made it impossible to exploit the rainforest. Ecotours are now being promoted. Bauxite mining has been the mainstay of the export economy.

History of the American Cooperative School

The American Cooperative School (ACS) was founded in the mid-60's by Suralco, a subsidiary of Alcoa, to accommodate their expatriate employees. At the same time, the missionary community opened a school for their children.

These schools merged in 1984 and were operated by the missionary community. Two years later the ACS Board bought the school from Suralco. ACS has been a catalyst, bringing together many segments of the local international community – to the enrichment of us all.

Since SIL (Bible translators) has provided 90% of the staff over the years, their plan to withdraw from Suriname in 2001 meant that ACS faced a crisis of existence. Therefore, in 1998, the Board of Directors contacted the Network of International Christian Schools (NICS) who agreed to accept ACS as an affiliate school.

This change allows the school to continue its education ministry with a local board, supervised by NICS.

Currently. The Board of Directors consists of representatives from the following missionary agencies: SIL, Christar, Southern Baptist, MAF, World Team, and Wesleyan.

Program of the School

The curriculum and organization of the school follows the typical format in Grades 1 through 8. There is one class at each grade level. The curriculum is based on the United States model and uses a combination of both Christian and secular publishers.

The students in Grade 9 through 12 are enrolled in the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, distance learning program. The students are supervised and assisted by a qualified tutor. The program is under the accreditation of the North Central Association Commission on Schools.

The program is now in transition to a regular high school curriculum. We received candidacy status from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and are in the process of seeking full accreditation.

Plans for the School

The high school is in a five year program to change from the current correspondence system to that of a regular classroom setting. It is the intention to add a subject specialist every year with a particular emphasis on Grade nine for the 2001-2002 school year.

Building Project

We have completed the construction a six classroom block with a multipurpose room. All rooms are air conditioned and wired for computer. This will enable us to expand our high school into a traditional class structure. A library and media center has been added to the facility. An existing classroom is being converted into a science laboratory.

Want More Information on Suriname? Check Out the Following URLs!

- 1) <http://www.sr.net/srnet/InfoSurinam/>
- 2) <http://www.surinam.net/>
- 3) <http://www.nics.org/suriname>
- 4) <http://www.photoisland.com>
user: accsuriname | AND | user: uthofone
pass: guest | | pass: guest

* these are photos that a friend of mine took and posted online!



Hello!

Welcome to Suriname!!

There's really not a whole lot I can say at this point. After all, I just got here. But, I can share my journal entries.

28 January 2002

Today I landed in Paramaribo, Suriname. My friend John McClung (who I met at my training in Memphis, TN this past summer) was there to meet me! He introduced me to the principal, Dr. Frank Martens, and helped me with my luggage. Since it was already night, I really couldn't see a lot, but I could tell that Suriname had lots of palm trees. As we drove, Dr. Martens told me a little bit about Suriname. For instance, the airport was built by the U.S. military. During WWII, the USA had a military presence here to mine the Bauxite, which is a material used in making aluminum. The United States was using aluminum to make airplanes. To ensure that the airport could not be hit by a battleship from sea, it was built far enough inland, out of range of hostile fire. Similarly, at the time the airport was built, it was only accessible by rail, and not by road. Today, of course, there is a road. Gold is also present in large quantities in Suriname, but most of it is mined illegally. People use mercury to mine the gold, a practice which was outlawed in the United States many years ago (remember the AK and CA gold rushes?). I also learned that there are many monopolies in Suriname. The airport is a monopoly. Suriname Air only comes into and out of Suriname twice a week. I feel like I'm back in Unalakleet! Some of my family members were concerned for my safety because they Suriname airport/ airplanes are NOT in compliance with FAA regulations. Why? Because the airport is a monopoly, and the family that owns the airport will not let an FAA approved inspector come out to inspect the airport. Hence, the FAA has ruled that the airport is out of compliance.

29 January 2002

Today was my first official day in Suriname. For the time being, I will be staying with my principal's house, until a permanent place for me can be found. After sleeping in a little bit, my principal came to get me and take me to school. The school is beautiful! A recent addition expanded the whole building, adding more classrooms and adding to the already existing network. The new part is seamlessly integrated with the old part. It's just incredible ; I didn't even know there was an old and a new part until it was pointed out to me! The new design fits that well! The neat thing is, the new building uses several varieties of woods indigenous to Suriname. The woods really makes the building stand out, and gives it a unique appearance. I am excited to be here! Since I just arrived, I spent most of today getting a feel for the school and how classes run. I spent time observing my friend John as well as the teacher I am going to replace. The teacher I am replacing will be going back to the United States because her daughter is having her first baby. When she comes back at the beginning of next year, I'll move into the high school and begin their English program, which has been run via the University of Nebraska high school correspondence school program. All classes are 50 minutes long. The school day begins at 7:30 AM (7:00 for teachers) and ends at 1:30 PM. Culturally, the "big meal" in Suriname is lunch. That is the time when families eat together and share stories about their day. Americans do the same thing, but at the evening meal.

30 January 2002

I finally had one full day at school. Since my first day of teaching will be on Friday, only two days away, I spent today observing the teacher I am to replace. I found out that my schedule is as follows: 7th grade Bible, 7th/8th grade English, 7th grade math, 6th grade English. On Wednesdays I teach art during 6th period, and on Fridays Speech. Otherwise, I'm done after only four periods of teaching. That is an incredible schedule, which gives me lots of free time to grade and get my work done! The school uses a standard American curriculum, which seems pretty straight forward. I shouldn't have any problem teaching the material - it all seems pretty basic, and doesn't require any preparation at all. I just hope I can find some creative ways to energize the material, while still teaching the basic concepts. I am told that the students are well behaved and are all-around good kids. Every other week there is a youth group that meets at the school, and on Mondays at 4:00 there is a men's Bible study as well as a woman's Bible study that meets for the benefit of the students. I plan to help out with the men's Bible study since my friend John leads it and it will be a good way to get to know the students outside of class.

31 January 2002

I am learning more about Suriname. For example, the country used to be a Dutch Colony. Originally, the toughest slaves were sent here, and Suriname was set up to be a plantation colony. As time progressed, several slaves either escaped or were freed and moved into the interior. As a result, they started their own culture. Meanwhile, the Dutch were busy building roads and starting businesses. Consequently, more and more of the Dutch culture made its way into Suriname. Today, Dutch is the official language. But, the culture didn't stop there. Individuals from southern China came over to start a new life. Many of them opened stores or began corporations, which are still in existence today. These Chinese people speak their own "brand" of Chinese, known as Hakka. In the same way, people from Indonesia and India also came to Suriname. In 1975, Holland decided to relinquish Suriname as a colony, and in the spirit of being nice, offered to exchange Holland passports for Surinamese passports, allowing Suriname nationals the chance to move to Holland if they so desired. About 1/3 of the population accepted this offer. However, only the people with money could afford to move to Holland. As a result, the top 1/3 of the Suriname population packed up and left for Holland, leaving Suriname and its less affluent people to run the country. This eventually led to two coup attempts, the devaluation of the guilder, and a plunge into 3rd world status. Besides some history, I am learning about present day Suriname. Driving is done on the left side of the road (British style). Many people have cars, though not as many as I expected to see. It is customary to honk if a driver is going to pass either a person or another car. This is not done out of anger, but more as a way of saying, "I'm here," or, "Notice me ; I'm close by."

1 February 2002

My first day of teaching! It felt wonderful to be back in the classroom after being out of one for nearly a month. The previous teacher planned tests in two of my classes, so today was a relatively easy day. The students were wonderful, and I enjoyed working with them. In the evening I went to youth group. I was surprised to see about twenty five students from the school show up. How encouraging! A dinner of spaghetti was served, but it included a special sauce that is made from peanuts. It was good! After that, one of the parents talked about what it means to be a Christian. Each student was then given a sheet of paper with the names of all students present on it. Students were to list one thing they liked about each person on the sheet. Later, these compliments would be typed up by the lady in charge. Then each student would get a list of all the compliments his/her peers wrote

down, along with a Bible verse that shows each student what Christ thinks of him/her. After that my friend John played a game with the group. It was a fun night

3 February 2002

This being Sunday, I went to church. It was interesting to see what a local church looked like. The church I attended was for Southern Baptists (there aren't any Lutheran churches here). The building was one giant room, with pews and a stage. The service began with the youth singing some songs. Then the whole congregation sang from the hymnal. A member of the church then gave a testimony about how God had healed him from some back pain. We then heard the sermon, partook of communion, sang a few more songs, and went home. The service was nice, but I was sad to see that there wasn't a set liturgy. Growing up in the Lutheran church, I have come to enjoy a set liturgy. So, next week I will try a different church. In the afternoon my principal took me on a photographic tour of Paramaribo. That was a lot of fun! We got to see some historic buildings (such as the building where slaves used to be sold), some old buildings which have been restored, an old fort, and city hall. Downtown is very unusual. I would describe it as tired. Most buildings were built using Dutch architecture and design. But, since so many were built so long ago, many are falling apart. At the same time, though, some buildings have been restored. It was odd to see a building that looks like it's about to fall over next to one that has obviously been restored and looks brand new. In the evening I went to another church service, one that is intended for the many missionaries who are here. They meet twice a month. The format for the service was very similar to the one from this morning.

4 February 2002

New week, new lesson plans: my own! Today I finally implemented my own lesson plans, as opposed to following the previous teacher's. I felt really good about how things went. The kids seemed to enjoy my teaching, and made no rude or mean comments. What's more, I know everyone's name! Of course, there are only twenty five students total, so it's not like there were a lot to memorize. Overall, the day was pretty easy. The lessons that I had to teach were not complicated, and the students grasped the concepts almost immediately. Things look good! After school (at 4:00) I went to the Men's Bible study. About ten students showed up. John told me that today is really the first day since the Bible study began that students have felt comfortable discussing the lesson at hand. That's a good thing! John also told me that many of these students don't have their own Bibles. As a result, he has been writing people to get donations for Bibles, and has been quite successful so far. Praise God!

8 February 2002

The school week went very well. Each day was pretty much the same. I'm so impressed with how easy the teaching is. The lesson concepts are so easy, and the students are mastering each lesson the first time I present it. How awesome! So, I'm quite impressed. Even better, I've been able to get all of my grading and planning done during my free periods, which means I don't have to take work home. As of right now, I'm so stress-free it's incredible. If things continue to go this well, I'm sure this will be a fantastic school year!

9 February 2002

Another teacher at the school, Audra, invited me to go downtown with her today. I met Audra at the two weeks of training I had this past summer in Memphis, TN, so we are already friends. We went downtown just to look around, and maybe shop. It was a lot of fun! Many of the stores are similar to American stores. Many of the same things can be bought, too. Naturally, Suriname doesn't have the same availability. Audra was looking for a garlic press. We must looked inside at least five stores, and didn't find one until the last one. I was mainly looking for cultural things, like clothing and art. Judging from the few stores we went into where cultural items are sold, it looks like a lot is done with wood. I saw lots of tables and chairs, as well as trinkets, carved from wood. Piranhas are also present in the rivers of Suriname. Some stores were selling real piranhas that have been preserved somehow. Since there are a lot of Chinese people here, I also saw stores where Chinese arts and crafts are sold. In fact, I found things that I had been looking for in China, but either could not buy (too expensive), could not find, or were too big to get home. Maybe I can buy some things here.

10 February 2002

I decided to try out a different church today. Audra has been going to a Presbyterian church, so I asked her if I could tag along. She picked me up early in the morning and we walked the short distance to the church. One thing I've noticed about all three churches I've been in so far is that none of them have had air conditioning- all use fans. The service had a nice liturgy, but one that is not quite as structured as the Lutheran ones. Still, it was better than nothing. We sang a lot of hymns, but didn't have communion. Overall, I liked this church better than the one I was at last week. I think next week I'll try this one again, though I wouldn't mind trying a third church before I finally settle into one.

14 February 2002

Today was a great day in school. The high school students do "singing valentines." This year 300 songs were ordered by other students and staff! What a great fundraiser! So all day the high school students went from class to class and delivered the songs. Quite the ordeal. Then they put one heart on the person to whom the song was sung, and that person is given a kiss, which leaves lipstick on his/her cheek! Two songs were ordered for me, both by students. I also got five valentines, in the form of cookies! Again, these were from five separate students. Last, I was given a jar of pre-made brownie mix, as a valentine (from a student). All I have to do is add the liquid ingredients. All this blew me away! I never expected to get anything: (A) because I'm so new here and (B) because I didn't think junior high students did that kind of thing. So, it was neat to see!

S t a t e m e n t o f S u p p o r t

As the Lord makes it possible, I will invest in the ministry of *Steven Dickens*

My plans are to teach 7th-12th grade English at the American Cooperative School in Paramaribo, Suriname. The students there are considered to be third-culture kids, and represent as many as twenty five different nationalities. As you may already know, I will be serving God through the Network of International Christian Schools (NICS). Because of this, I need to raise some financial support to cover expenses such as: health insurance, visa fees, immunizations, some school supplies, and other needs, etc.

Should it be financially feasible for you support my ministry, please fill out the form below. I appreciate any support you are able to give. Thank you!

If you want your donation to be tax-deductible, send your support to NICS.

If you are concerned, and want to make sure I get the support you are giving, it is also acceptable to send your support directly to me.

Form for New Monthly Support & One-Time Gift

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I wish to support the ministry of Steven Dickens at the American Cooperative School

_____ MONTHLY SUPPORT _____ ONE-TIME GIFT _____ PRAYER SUPPORT

Name _____ Address _____

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Phone () _____ Questions: Call NICS 1-800-887-NICS

Send checks payable to NICS and put "project #01450" in the memo field of the check. For tax purposes, do not put my name on the check. Project #01450 designates me as the recipient. A tax-deductible receipt will be mailed to you within two weeks. Mail to:

NICS Financial Department • PO Box 1260 • Southaven, MS • 38671