

You meet the nicest people in Panama

Written by T. Rob Brown (aka Roberto Chocolate)

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It truly is a small, small world.☐

My wife and I met a family (Del and Pam Vezeau) and their two kids, Seth and Lauren at Woody's 2 at Playa Blanca just before Christmas last year.

They kindly offered to sponsor the Christmas in Coclé project by buying a \$350 inverter for Santa's sleigh (my truck, with a couch decorated as Santa's sleigh on the roof) so we could play Christmas carols for the kids of Guzman during their first-ever Christmas party.

Guzman is one of the poorest villages in all of Panama, with 95% unemployment, very poor soil, no indoor plumbing or electricity.

The Vezeau family helped us decorate the sleigh and the trailer that we used for our elves to toss out candy. They even came with us up into the mountains to the poor little village to help hand out plates of traditional Christmas ham dinner and used clothing while Santa (you guess who) handed out wrapped presents to each of the kids. The party included a traditional pinata as well.

While driving back to the Interamerica highway, we stayed up on the roof even as we descended down steep, steep roads. At times Mr. and Mrs. Santa had to lay back flat on the floor of the roof to prevent falling out of the sleigh.

Kids rushed down from the hills to the sounds of the sleigh bells and Santa's "Ho Ho Ho";

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They were awe-struck. They had seen many dark-skinned Santa's before - but this one was white - and he spoke English!! This was the REAL Santa!!! They cried out in unison "Papa Noel, Papa Noel" and clambered excitedly for the tossed candy.

A young mother, a mere child herself, carrying an infant on her hip as two small children ran bare-butt beside her, cried as we handed her children wrapped presents - she said "Gracias por mis hijos" (thank you for my children).

It was the best Christmas any of us had spent in many, many years.

Del and I became fast friends. Over cocktails one afternoon we discovered that back in Canada we lived less than 50 kilometers from each other. We then discovered we were both Irish, and that our ancestors were both one of the thirteen tribes of Galway - and to make the small world smaller still — his great-great-great grandfather - Judge Lynch married Mary Brown - you guessed it — my great, great, great grandmother.

What are the chances of two distant relatives coming together on Christmas in a strange new land?

We are visiting the Vezeau's in the Kingston area this weekend. They bought a house in Chiriqui Province of Panama and are coming down in November.

See? You really do meet the nicest people in Panama. Roberto