

RH10:Local People, Gordon and Brenda Wilkinson Authors of the Recipes for Disaster Cookbook.

This month we feature Brenda and Gordon Wilkinson who were inspired to write a cookbook – Recipes for Disaster - after travelling through the Honduran rainforest in a dugout canoe and eating a daily diet of rice and beans.

Their trip was the start of a two-year journey into territory more familiar to Delia Smith and Jamie Oliver than to what you might expect for two PhD science graduates. There's still time to buy their books for Christmas... they make great presents!

Brenda - how did you get involved with Tearfund?

Over 20 years ago friends at St. John's Church in Felbridge – Pat and Keith Hughesden - were buying Tearcraft goods and selling them locally to raise money for some of the world's poorest people. We sometimes helped out with these sales of fairly-traded craft goods and when Pat and Keith emigrated to Australia we carried on where they left off. Each year we sold a few hundred pound's worth of these beautiful hand-made goods at a couple of venues in the pre-Christmas period, but everything changed when we sold our local science publishing company in 2000. We now work virtually full time as volunteers and the work is very rewarding.

What sort of business was it Gordon?

We produced marketing newsletters and reports on scientific instruments from our offices at Shawlands Court in Newchapel. We had been selling these internationally since 1984, but when we received an offer to buy the publishing business, we said "Yes" so that we could spend more time with our family, have more freedom to travel and find more time for volunteer work with Tearfund. Actually, we've used the experience we gained from publishing in our fund-raising work with Tearfund to produce a cookbook, but I'll say more about that in a minute.

Before we come to the cookbook, tell us about Tearfund's work Brenda.

Well, Tearfund is a UK disaster relief and development charity that works through church-based partners in over 70 countries. In the year to March 2006, it received over £50 million, two-thirds of which came from individuals and churches. The important thing is that money that's donated to Tearfund doesn't go through government agencies, but it gets sent straight to where it's needed. Having run our own business for over 25 years we know how important accountability is and we're really impressed with the way that Tearfund's partners overseas use the money that's sent to them. Head office admin costs are also kept to a minimum with fund-raising and publicity being only 8% of income. It's amazing how a small amount of money can make such a huge difference.

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Gordon, has this work enabled you to travel to interesting places?

Interesting is the right word, but challenging as well! Earlier this year we helped to lead a trip for Tearfund volunteers to Colombia. Everyone paid for themselves – this wasn't a freebie. The idea was for the group to visit some of the projects that Tearfund is funding through its Children at Risk programme. They would then come back to the UK and write articles, give interviews and do presentations about what they had seen. It was a challenging trip and we visited places that are definitely off the tourist track such as the shantytowns outside Bogotá, Medellín and Cartagena; in fact, I wouldn't feel confident going as a tourist, but with a Tearfund partner it's as if you're visiting family. The shantytowns that I mentioned are home to over three million people that have been forced to leave the countryside by armed groups. We got a real sense of the poverty, violence and injustice suffered by the people there, but came home feeling positive that Tearfund's partners are transforming lives and communities.

How about you Brenda?

I suppose one of my favourite memories is of our trip on a Tearfund Study Tour to Honduras in 2004. Part of that trip involved visiting some of the projects designed to help indigenous communities in the rainforest of La Mosquitia to develop without damaging the environment. Getting into the rainforest involved flights that landed on grass runways in forest clearings and many hours in motorised and dug-out canoes. We really enjoyed staying in a house on stilts in the jungle with no gas, electricity or phone - quite an experience! We had a choice of washing with water from a barrel or swimming in the river. However, spending a couple of weeks eating mostly rice and beans, led us to think about the kind of foods that people in other countries have to eat as their staple diets. We then thought of producing a cookbook with recipes from some of the world's poorest places. Gordon had the idea of calling it Recipes for Disaster... Relief and Development, which has certainly helped create some interest!

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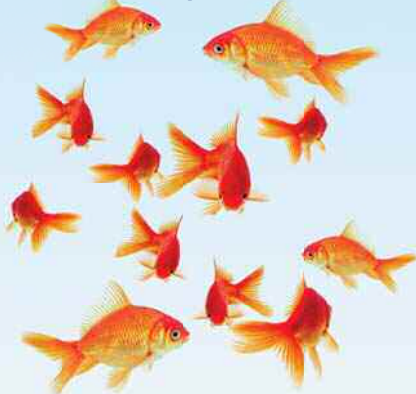
RH10:Local People

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So Gordon, what's the book about?

First of all, I need to stress that the title is no reflection on Brenda's cooking! It's a recipe book with a difference in that we not only provide recipes from 25 of the 70 countries where Tearfund works, but we also tell the reader a little about the country and how Tearfund's partner there is bringing hope to a particular community. That might be caring for AIDS orphans in Cambodia, providing lunches for school children in Haiti, or ensuring that craft workers in Peru and Thailand have an outlet for their products and get a fair wage. It's just a selection because Tearfund works with about 300 partners on 550 projects worldwide. There are 43 recipes that range from Spicy Bolivian Beef to Liberian Chicken Casserole and Zambian Sweet Potato Puff.

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Every one has been checked by us or our friends. My favourites are empanadas, a kind of pasty, which is Argentina's equivalent of fish and chips and carrot halva from Pakistan - delicious. We cooked empanadas with Class 5 children at Halsford Park School, East Grinstead early in November when we went into the school to talk to them about poverty, fair trade and the way in which Tearfund is helping children in other countries to have a better life. A couple of months earlier we had done a similar event at St. Mary's School and we've been invited to other schools as well.

You're the accountant Brenda – how are sales going? In a word, brilliantly! We collected the books in early June from En Route Print in Lingfield who did a superb printing job. By the end of September we had sold 1,000 copies at £7 and we were able to make a donation of £3,000 to Tearfund.

The recipe books are still selling like hot cakes (that's Gordon's phrase, not mine!) and we were able to make another donation of £3,000 in early November. Our target is to raise £25,000 for Tearfund's disaster work in Africa, the Americas and Asia, so we're a quarter of the way there! What seems to be happening now is that people that bought a single copy a few weeks ago are coming back and reordering multiple copies as Christmas presents, which is marvellous. We send off our books from the Post Office in Copthorne Bank and the staff there are kindly helping our efforts by selling copies for us. They are also available from Flanagans Butchers in Crawley Down. If we don't have to post the book, all of the £7 will now go to Tearfund.

If people want to buy direct, they can reach us at tearfund@felbridge.com or on 01342 323382.



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