

Alumni Focus

Michael McDonald

Quick facts:

Married in 1992

Years at NBC: 1995-98

Favorite Class if any: Anything with Denver Kroeker-- I loved all of his classes

Kids names/ages: Elijah-10; Caleb-8; Jacob -6

Which town you serve in: Playas de Rosarito / Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico

Job description: Bible School teacher to pastors and church leaders. Also, I am the director of YUGO's 'Project Joy' - a Christmas gift program for poor kids and orphans in the Tijuana area. Additionally, I am a teacher and trainer for new missionaries and missionary interns.

Are there any other missionaries who are situated in your town?: Yes, there are a lot. We are a border town of almost 3 million people and there are many missionaries here working in mercy missions, poverty relief, leadership training, and leading short term missions.

Years in Mexico: 1 1/2-- all in this area

Favorite Mexican food: Chile Rellenos - it is a chile pepper stuffed with cheese and covered in an egg batter and fried. It has a mild tomato sauce poured over top and Mexicans will tell you it is very healthy for you (which is what they say when they have an especially tasty food they want an excuse to eat lots of!)

Biggest stereotype you had that was shattered when you went to Mexico:

The "lazy Mexican" sitting under a tree sleeping with his sombrero. Mexican people are very hard working, often working from 7 am until late into the night at 2 jobs or more for 6 days a week. On Sunday, many will work on their houses or something else. They are the hardest working people I know.

New hobbies and interests you've picked up since you were there: Wow, not much really for new hobbies...I have been working on learning Spanish. And then... there is the 'border game'. We live 30 minutes from the US border and I need to cross the border at least once a week for work or shopping. The wait in line is 1-2 hours long, depending on the time of day and which lane you get into. The 'border game' is trying to sneak your way into the fastest lanes by waiting for unsuspecting tourists in the lanes next to you to leave just enough space for you to "bud" in on them - while at the same time being sure no one pulls in on you.

Things you miss most about Canada: 1)Watching the NHL on TV. I can get broadcasts here over the internet, but they are extremely grainy and you sometimes cannot see the puck... or the teams logos. You just need to remember if the Canucks are in darks or whites. On the flip side...we are 90 minutes away from LA or Anaheim (after the border game) and tickets are about \$10.00 each so we can go see a game live once or twice a year... (when the Canucks are in town). 2)Heat in the homes. That may sound odd, seeing as we are in Mexico - but we are right by the cool Pacific

Ocean and in the winter the highs are about 14C with lows of about 6C average - but for a couple weeks a year it gets no warmer than 10-12C and almost down to freezing. So your unheated, uninsulated house is the same temperature as outside. It'd be nice to have a fireplace or heater to take the chill off. Otherwise, you are always cold for days or weeks at a time.

Thing you miss the least: -40C. Snow. Expensive fast food. Burgers and fries.

J: Michael, thanks so much for giving me a few minutes to talk with you. I really appreciate it, although it's hard to know what direction to head with my first question. Is it just me or does it seem like yesterday we were just a couple of fresh faced students at NBI?

M: It's just you, Jason. I had one boy our 3rd year of NBI and now have 3 strapping little eating machines. It seems like a long time ago to me that I was roaming the halls of NBI trying to understand Dr. Bob's Psych class...

J: I know there was a gap in years from the time you and Sharlene left Nipawin, and when you headed to Mexico. How and when did Mexico become a possibility, and in retrospect, to what end do you see God's timing or plan in that move down south?

M: We had always been interested in Missions-- especially to the less fortunate folks of our world. I'm glad I had the opportunity to learn ministry practically the last few years. In Prince Albert we started a youth ministry from Scratch at Scarborough Baptist church. In Victoria, BC we helped do the same in a struggling little church. It was very part time so I worked 3 jobs on the side to make a living. One of my jobs was with the city, directing a youth drop-in Center for at-risk kids.. In Loon Lake I senior pastored a small church. We took a short-term mission trip to Chihuahua, Mexico where we very strongly sensed God's call into Missions in Mexico. We've seen God's hand in directing us by giving us experiences in leadership and followership, by giving us a heart for the disenfranchised wherever we've gone and by giving us lots of opportunity to see our Canadian culture and how it influences us and our Christianity and therefore allowing us to recognize our foibles as we cross cultures.

J: It's interesting how our perspective of life, and our place in it, changes over the years. If you reflect on your years in Mexico, what areas have you especially seen changes in your perspective?

M: My perspective on "things"-- our stuff-- is what is changing the most. When I saw orphanages crying out to God for their daily bread and watching Him supply... When I saw Christians who live in little more than a ramshackle hut want to share the little food they had with me. And when I saw their God-given joy despite their

poverty it took me for a loop. It took me a bit, but I realized why- though we talk a good game in North America, by and large we believe our satisfaction, our happiness, lies in our economic success. When we contemplate life with all of the extras stripped away and we have no economic security, no “home equity”, no retirement plan, no savings, no health insurance, no one and nothing else to rely upon but God--- we get pretty bent out of shape. And these folks will often never even dream of having such luxuries as these things and yet have more joy in the Lord than I may ever have. My “stuff” is more of a barrier in my relationship with God and less of a blessing than I originally thought.

J: One of my assumptions of Mexico is that the pace of life is a little slower than the one many of us Canadians and Americans find ourselves living. I think many of us struggle to make the meaningful relationships God intended us to have. Do you think the slower pace makes it any easier building those with the people you are brushing paths with day to day?

M: Well, yes and no. The pace is a bit slower, but necessity calls for an awful lot of time to be spent in surviving that leisure time is not a luxury most have. That makes relationships a little more difficult to foster than you may think. That being said, I can't just go to someones house or place of work for a quick question. There needs to be time spent talking, maybe having a coffee or soda together and all the things we've been meaning to talk about need to be discussed. There are opportunities to build relationships here, but being in a border town close to the US has influenced this place quite a bit so it isn't as slowly paced as our assumptions would lead us to believe!

J: As a missionary, you of course experience first hand the blessings that come through the giving of others. How has this impacted your own thinking and approach to giving? Aside from your support, are there any other significant ways you have felt blessed through the giving of others?

M: Y'know-- I'm Scottish. And we're known for being a bit frugal. So over the years I have not been much of a giver. I've struggled from time to time to dedicate myself to giving 10% of what I make to the Lord. And every period in my life when I struggled with that because I was too poor, or needed something else this month or whatever the excuse was, We dug a deeper financial hole for ourselves. But after watching people give sacrificially and generously to our ministry we have been more than OK with giving the Lord the first fruits. And the results have been incredible- knock your socks off exciting blessings. Now having said that, I'm no proponent of giving because of what it gets you. I'm just saying that it has been the most freeing thing I've felt in a long time-- the dollars aren't mine- they are God's and after seeing Him supply our needs it encourages me to do the same for others! I'm free not just to give the first 10%, but more to a pastor who needs gas money or food... I have a cool

giving story... Irv, Mari and Leah Penner came down here this January. Originally it was just a holiday and visit type of thing, but they got thinking about some of the orphanages we work with and wondered if they could help out at all. It was Leah's idea, actually. She gathered 5 friends together and had a piano recital / coffee house for donations to the orphanage. They raised over \$1000 to give to these kids. This orphanage has 22 people in a 750 square foot house. They struggle with daily needs and were hugely blessed by this gift. They regularly get under \$200.00/ month to feed and house 22 people in an economy with a cost of living similar to Nipawins. They can go through 40 litres of Vacuum packed milk a week at a cost of \$40.00! After we'd given them the food, we all prayed together and the children came by, laid hands on the Penners and all prayed at the same time for them for about 15 minutes. It was a very moving experience- and once again the givers were as blessed (or more so) than those who received!

J: Do you see yourself in Mexico for the long haul? What are some ways you see your children benefiting from the childhood they are having, growing up in a different culture and country than say, both you and Sharlene grew up in?

M: We're here for a long time, we think. There are 2 major areas we see helping with in Mexico. One is training untrained pastors at least the equivalent of 1 year of Canadian Bible College. Most pastors here have little or no training and no funds to put towards training. So lots of the churches are small and struggling and prone to theological and practical errors. There is a huge desire for Biblical and Ministry training. We plan on training the pastors to be Bible School Teachers as well. After finishing our course they will be qualified to teach it to others. This way we hope to train 1000 pastors in 10 years. The second great need is for pastors and missionaries to venture further south to an area known as the Circle of Silence in South Central Mexico. There are many towns and cities with no Evangelical Churches at all. We want the poor Mexican churches in our area to be Missionary sending and supporting churches to their country and across the seas as the Lord Directs. Kids are resilient and though not all of the changes have been easy or smooth, I think our kids are learning that life wasn't supposed to be easy and smooth, despite what we often expect in North America. We are making a point of discipling our kids as servants of God no matter what their vocation in life may be. When our boys say what they may want to be when they grow up we always ask them - How will that job enable you to serve Jesus and His Kingdom and help people like widows and orphans? And, after a little thinking they conclude that they can either make some money and support missionaries, or they can invent something to help the people, or they can take time and go themselves over the summer to tell people about Jesus. I think they are learning that Kingdom Work is our career, no matter what our vocation may be.

J: I think that when many of us think of Mexico, we think of Cancun and Puerto Vallarta. Does a family vacation in Mexico seem as appealing or exquisite now that

you live there permanently?

M: Where we work is so far away from the resort cities in so many respects that they hardly seem like they are on the same planet, never mind in the same country! I work with the type of folks who would tend the gardens and clean those rooms for \$50.00/week and try to feed their family on that! I feel hesitant to vacation in a little surreal, gated, indulgent North American enclave in the shadow of the real Mexico. We'd love to see deeper into Mexico, but maybe in a way that Mexicans would do it!

J: Thank you so much Michael. Perhaps we'll be hearing a little more from you at an alumni weekend in the near future.

M: Thanks for thinking of us! We appreciate the opportunity to share a bit of what God is doing in our small corner His World!