



Amy and Jason Bartsch provide dental care to a boy in the Philippines.

Local couple's dental mission 'changed lives forever'

By Dr. Jason Bartsch

To say that our experience in the Philippines was remarkable would be to understate the impact that it had on each member of our group.

For this particular mission, our group consisted of 16 members including five dentists from primarily B.C. and Alberta.

Upon our arrival in Manila the group was split into two smaller groups and our group – including Amy, myself, and Dr. Justin Wong from Edmonton – boarded a van for the city of San Jose del Monte.

A city of 600,000 located an hour and a half northeast of Manila, San Jose del Monte may be described as the poor suburb of Manila. Homeless families from Manila have found relocation in San Jose del Monte, where they are able to find a roof and some shelter.

The reception our group experienced was one of profound gratitude and appreciation. We

worked for five days in our makeshift clinic and treated primarily patients wanting dental extractions, cleanings and some minor dental restorations.

The level of oral health was in my opinion, bordering on abysmal. To say what it feels like to remove the four front teeth of a 13-year-old girl because they are so far beyond repair, doesn't do justice to the sickening feeling you feel knowing she will never have front teeth again. It does however make you feel encouraged to see this same young lady smiling and thanking you immensely when the work is done, knowing now she doesn't have to experience the discomfort she has lived with for several years. This picture we saw time and time again.

From San Jose del Monte we travelled to a small town on the island of Negros occidental to the south. Our small group of seven worked in the two communities of Manloca-

hoc and San Jose, about 30 minutes from the small town of Sipalay.

The scene in this gorgeous part of the country was similar to setting you would see in *Platoon*, very rural, primarily rice and fruit farming communities.

We were very fortunate during our travels to be hosted by local families organized by local Rotary clubs. The experience we had staying with our hosts, eating their food, and living as they did, is one I will cherish always. Without modern conveniences such as hot water, flushing toilets and very limited amenities we found ourselves completely immersed in this beautiful culture.

One thing for sure, the Philippine people are some of the kindest and most selfless groups I have ever encountered. To be a part of such a wonderful initiative and truly experience the Filipino culture is an opportunity that I know has made Amy and myself better people. They have taught us to give when we have nothing, and love your neighbour without condition, examples of which we would see over and over.

From the patients we treated, to the volunteer health workers who helped us, to the local Rotary members, local government officials, host families and members of the communities at large – they all truly respected each other and worked together to improve the quality of life for everyone in their community.

It goes without saying that despite the over 1,500 patients Justin and I treated, and 2,300 extractions later, the mission was a tremendous success and changed lives on both sides of the Pacific forever.