

# Sharing stories from the SLUMS

Dordt professor filming documentary to reveal impoverished conditions in world

BY KILEY SELIGMAN  
STAFF WRITER

**S**IOUX CENTER—Selma grew up in Guatemala with an alcoholic mother. To get money to support her habit, Selma's mother rented her daughter out to men when she was only 8 years old. At age 9, Selma was sold to a brothel and spent her days in a dark room with chains around her ankles.

As she got older, Selma's story only got worse. Now in her 40s, Selma is fighting cancer.

Mark Volkers, an instructor in digital media at Dordt College in Sioux Center, met Selma while filming a documentary about slums in La Limonada, a slum in Guatemala City.

"You start to identify with these people," he said. "As a Christian you think, how can this be? As a human being, how can this be?"

A steep one-mile ravine home to 60,000 people, La Limonada is the largest slum in Central America. In comparison, Sioux County has about half the population in 768 times the space.

About one-sixth of the world, over 1 billion people, live in slums, Volkers said. The number is quickly and quietly growing and is expected to soon reach 2 billion.

Volkers decided it was time to get this statistic out.

Living in Africa for seven years and traveling the developing world as a photojournalist for 10 years, Volkers saw extreme poverty.

"I spent time with the poorest of the poor, so it has been on my heart for a number of years," he said.

Last fall, Volkers knew the time was right to start a documentary about slums. Directing and filming suits his work as a Dordt communications professor.

"It fit in well with the program

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**Mark Volkers**

DIGITAL MEDIA INSTRUCTOR  
AT DORDT COLLEGE

at Dordt, because a lot of students are involved in it," he said. "It fits in well with our concern for the bigger world."

Volkers and Dordt students, including student producer Hani Yang, are filming residents of three slums in Asia, Latin America and Africa.

"A good way to tell that story is to focus on individuals," he said.

Volkers and a crew visited Pasig City in the Philippines over Christmas break. Some of Volkers' contacts set him up with the Alquino family.

The Filipino family lives under a freeway bridge, near a garbage dump. They set up bamboo poles between two bridge supports and sleep on them, above a canal.

"It wreaks," Volkers said.

Out of six children, only the oldest goes to school. Fifteen-year-old Jovelyn Alquino hopes to become a nurse so she can support her five younger brothers and her parents.

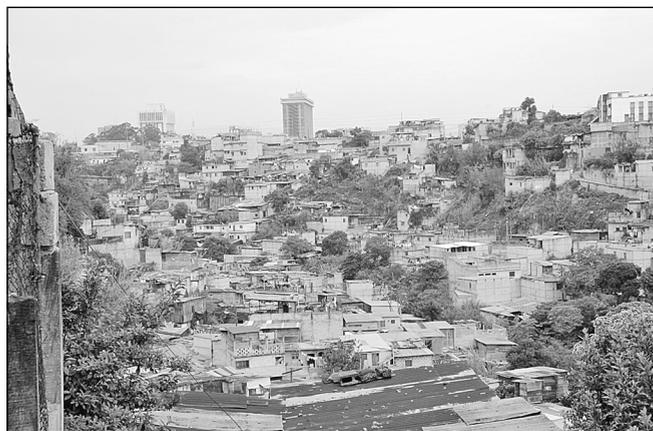
"I've come to realize that these people, the billion, live on \$2 a day," Volkers said. "They don't like it."

"It's not like they're satisfied with their lot in life," he added. "No one wants to stay in that situation."

He said slum dwellers have dreams and aspirations just like anyone else.



Mark Volkers of Orange City, Joel Aguilar of Guatemala City and John Wagenaar of Orange City move to another filming location in La Limonada, the largest slum in Central America located in Guatemala City. Volkers was in Guatemala in May, filming for a documentary he is creating about slums in Asia, Latin America and Africa. (Photos submitted)



La Limonada in Guatemala City is the largest slum in Central America. The steep one-mile ravine area serves as home to about 60,000 people.

His crew headed to Latin America to film their second slum in May.

Volkers said many documentaries focus on the favelas, slums, in Rio de Janeiro.

"Do they need more PR? It's an almost romanticized notion of poverty," Volkers said.

He wanted to focus on another place in Latin America.

"Unfortunately, there are a lot of slums to choose from in Latin America," he said.

Volkers chose La Limonada in Guatemala City.

There, Volkers met Selma and

another woman, Tanya. Tanya has only one leg and is confined to a wheelchair. Each day her father pushes her up the slum's ravine slope to beg in the city.

This winter vacation, Volkers plans to finish up his slum filming in Nairobi, Kenya. He then will talk with academics and writers to finish the film.

The startup funding for the documentary came from the Andreas Center, an organization associated with Dordt that gives grants for faculty, staff and students "to interact with the larger world," according to

Volkers.

## AT A GLANCE:

**Name:** Mark Volkers

**Position:** Instructor of digital media at Dordt College in Sioux Center, director of the slum documentary

**Age:** 44

**Residence:** Orange City

**Family:** Wife, Janelle; daughters, Elsa, 18, and Lauren, 16; son, Colin, 11

**Hobbies:** Traveling, reading, motorcycles, good food.

## FOR MORE INFO:

■ Check out the slum documentary Web site at [www.slumdoc.com](http://www.slumdoc.com). To donate to the slum documentary, contact Mark Volkers at (712) 722-6231 or [mvolkers@dordt.edu](mailto:mvolkers@dordt.edu).

Volkers.

He is waiting to hear about a grant he applied for from the Sundance Documentary Fund. He also is open to donations.

Volkers plans to finish the documentary by early fall 2010. He wants to tell the story of slum dwellers in an entertaining way so people want to watch.

He hopes to have global distribution of the film.

As Volkers speaks with different groups about his project, he is happy with the response he has received.

"I've just been thrilled at the level of interest and excitement," he said. "Some people are already asking, 'What can we do?'"

He is not sure of the answer. Part of filming the documentary is figuring out how to fix the problem.

Volkers also is not sure the direction his documentary eventually will take.

"You don't write the script," he said. "First, you shoot, and the story reveals itself as you go."