



Westminster
Presbyterian Church

Meisel Reflection 2016: Phillip Engh

I'd like to open by saying that I am eternally grateful for the love and support this community has provided over the years. These lasting gifts have translated into numerous trips to Cuba and innumerable life-long relationships with natives of the island, and with Westminster members alike. Solo trips and group trips to Cuba have always been built on the strong foundation of mentorship. From Meisel meetings in Minneapolis to daily debriefs on the roof of the Versailles Church, these bonds form and flourish.

My Westminster mentorship experience begins with a mustache. Don't get me wrong, it's no *simple* mustache. It's a somewhat extraordinary one that many of you see on a weekly basis. It's one that belongs to Ed (or as we say in Cuba, Eduardo) Cunnington. This consistent figure within our community has also been a long-running staple of Cuba trips, and been a resource and friend to all those who have ventured to the island.

On my very first trip to Cuba, in the Summer of 2009, we had been performing a series of skits for the Cuban children participating in our VBS program. One of my roles entailed a crudely drawn mustache. As Jessie Wright was sketching the thin 'stache, which curled upward at the edge of my mouth, Ed strolled by. No words were spoken, but the message was clear. With small nod of approval and a hand gesture pointing to his own mustache, I knew that one day I would have my very own. Much to the chagrin of my mother, Nancy, I did eventually reach that goal.

Ed's role in my life became far more than an inspiration on the facial hair front. He became a close friend, a brilliant travel partner, and the person I instantly look for when the late service ends. From logistical miracles of packing duffels and roller boards full of filters and supplies in the basement of the church, to relaxing coffee breaks, discussing life, family and Cuba, Ed has become an immovable figure in my life.

His dedication to providing clean water across the island I've come to know and love is astonishingly inspiring. A few years ago he found himself a position to accept the role of Moderator in the Living Waters for the World network. It was not a task he asked for or sought out, but one that came to him as the result of a family medical emergency of the prior moderator. Ed took on the role in stride and has created new heights in the work that his predecessor did so efficiently.

With his 25th trip to Cuba approaching, he stands to challenge Tim's lengthy record! 51 systems are currently operating across the island. An additional system will be arriving in Cardenas in the following weeks. Three systems have already reached one million gallons of clean water provided. A fourth is soon to follow. Ed is currently looking at the viability of each and every system being visited and evaluated at least once a year. The construction and subsequent function of these systems are important, but the assurance of a system's longevity is imperative. This is good work in the world. I urge those of you who have not been to Cuba to consider such a visit. Or even reach out to those who have, so you might hear the life-changing stories that come from that beautiful island country. I know I'd be willing to discuss my various visits with anyone interested.

As a mentor, Ed taught me about the logistics of a Cuba trip. You bring what you need, and you never rely on finding what you forget. This has translated into life lessons of preparedness throughout my college and post-college life. He taught me about the systems and their functionality, inspiring me to dually utilize my Meisel Scholarship for a visit to Clean Water U prior to my island journey. He instilled in me the importance of saying no in a situation that necessitates such an answer. There are dozens of sites across the island that desperately need the gift of clean water. Some of those sites do not have the facilities or consistency of water flow to structurally support or maximally utilize a given system. It's never easy saying no to those in need. However, it creates the desire to find a location in the same region that might be able to serve multiple communities. After all, improvisation is key when traveling to Cuba.

These travels and this desire to bring such simple gifts to those who have seldom experienced them are commonalities that brought Ed and I together.

I am so lucky and equally grateful to have him in my life. For those of you that don't know Ed (if there are any of you!), he's the stoic figure in the central third row of the sanctuary. If you're still having trouble seeing him, look for the handlebar mustache I'm convinced he was born with. Reach out to him, you'll not regret it. Never mistake his quiet demeanor for timidity, for his kindness resonates emphatically.

This brings me to a culminating lesson learned from my good friend: things rarely follow even the most perfect plan...roll with the punches and be kind to the people you meet along the way. Thank you all. Cheers!