It's been long road from here to S. America

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OAKLAND — It's thousands of miles from Guffey Road to South America, but Diane Bailey has made the transition successfully and with grace.

She'd be the first to tell you it wasn't easy, but she'd also say she wouldn't change any of the steps it took to change her from a rural-bred girl with a high school diploma to a college graduate with two degrees, living in a crowded foreign city of five million people.

Every move she's made was a learning experience and ultimately placed her in a position to be what she wanted to be — a missionary-teacher.
Bailey returned to this, her native county, in December, leaving her home in Santiago, Chile, when the thermometer was hovering around 95 degrees. And she'll go back in June when that city, always surrounded by snow-capped mountains, is beginning its three-months winter, often as cold as 20 degrees.

Currently she's on furlough, visiting her parents, Margie Culbreth Bailey and Ernest Bailey, where she is reminded of one of the reasons she chose her ministry:

"My grandfather on my mother's side, was an old-time circuit riding preacher and that had an influence on my life. I wanted to be like Grandpa."

She's lived in Chile for more than 10 years and served her job in the Baptist Theological Seminary there nine years — long enough, she says, "that I think in Spanish now, and have to mentally translate into English."

When she first arrived, she did the reverse. Learning the language was imperative, she said.

After graduation from the Southern Baptist Seminary in New Orleans, she was appointed to Chile and sent to Costa Rica to a Spanish language institute operated cooperatively by 12 different missions.

"We were in a Spanish-speaking land, in a school where the teachers don't speak English. We had classes in the morning, then were sent out into the community that afternoon. We heard only that language on the radio, television — we were immersed in the language.

"I had only one class in Spanish when I was at Gardner-Webb but I had studied Greek to help me as a religion major and that made Spanish easier."

Though Bailey was sent by the Southern Baptist Convention, other Protestant denominations had students there. "I had classmates from Switzerland, Japan, many countries — a broadening experience."

School was difficult "and it was a good weeding process. Several students didn't finish while I was there."

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After graduation they offered me a full-time job, then I became assistant manager and traveled around the state helping set up new stores.

"But all the time the Lord was calling me into full-time work, and I was fighting it. I lived in Shelby, sang in the church choir, taught Sunday School, worked in mission organizations, but every time I'd walk toward my job, it was like the Lord was hitting me on the shoulder saying, "this is not it.""

Eventually, she began to yield. It was a tremendous decision for her.

"I was a member of Adaville Baptist Church, and I talked to the pastor and the minister of music there. They advised me to start at Gardner-Webb."

"No one in my family had gone to college, I had been out of school so long, and I didn't want to fail. But I took tests and passed. This was in June and I was accepted by the end of July — usually it takes months."

"I sold all my furniture, appliances, got loans and worked as a secretary at the college. But when I gave in, I found the Lord opened doors."

"I feel God has a plan for all of us, we have to have the faith to let him. I see him work every day helping and guiding me."