



February 2009

# Reflections from Honduras

## Fellow Man International Foundation

### *When Cancer Strikes the Poorest of the Poor - Eligio Caravantes' Story*



Eligio Caravantes has not been anywhere outside of his small mountain home for more than twenty years. The gentle seventy-two year old man came to the clinic because his “cheek was hurting”. He had visited the local health center which is run by a nurse’s aid and treated for infection

for the last nine months. When the antibiotics were shown to have no effect and the mass on his cheek continued to grow, Don Eligio made his way out of his village on the back of a mule to search for help. After a two hour mule ride and then another two hour truck ride, he finally found his way to our clinic. It was obvious to the clinic’s physician, Dr. Marvin Pineda that the mass on Eligio’s cheek was most likely cancerous.

After speaking with Dr. Pineda at length, Eligio was given a date to return so that I could take him to San Pedro Sula for evaluation. It would be the first time Eligio had left his mountain village for years. As he hopped into the front seat of the truck, you could tell he was nervous, but the excruciating pain in his left cheek was enough to overcome his anxiety. Thankfully, one of the Projimos (FMI Honduras) board members is an oncologist and surgeon who specializes in treating patients with cancer. Dr. Manuel Maldonado is a good man who is always willing to help his fellow Honduran in need. As soon as he had a moment to examine Don Eligio he arrived at a tentative diagnosis. The mass on this poor man’s cheek was more than likely maxillary sinus cancer. Unfortunately, the cancer was now well advanced. Quickly, Dr. Maldonado began to form a plan to help Don Eligio. The most important first step would be to obtain laboratory tests and a biopsy of the tumor. Because Dr. Maldonado works at the Cancer League, he was able to make special provisions for a huge reduction in cost for the biopsy. Dr. Maldonado and Dr. Arnulfo Madrid (past president of Fellow Man International of Honduras) were more than happy to donate their pro-

fessional services to obtain the biopsy which would require a short surgical procedure. After the results of the biopsy are obtained, Dr. Maldonado will make the final determination regarding the appropriate next step, whether it be to attempt to treat Eligio’s cancer or at the very least provide pain relief.

As Don Eligio stepped back into the truck, I wondered if this humble man was able to comprehend his situation. I could only imagine what it would feel like to walk in his shoes. He is a widower. He only has one son who lives close to him and even the son lives in abject poverty. Certainly without the mission’s help, Don Eligio would be destined to suffer in silence until the disease took its natural course.

Finally, I asked him if he was hungry and he responded, “if you want to give me something to eat, I won’t refuse”. We went to eat a hamburger. I wondered if he had ever eaten a hamburger in his life! The answer became apparent as he ate his burger piece by piece, first the top bun, then the pickles, tomatoes, lettuce and finally the ground beef patty. By the time he finished his meal, there was not a crumb left. He seemed to be hungry even after his combo, so I decided to treat him to an ice cream cone. I could have never guessed ice cream was unknown to him. He pondered the dessert I had placed in his hand and then pulled the scoop of ice cream off of the cone. As the melting ice cream streamed through his fingers he said, “Gringa, I sure appreciate the gesture but what shall I do with all of these things to which I am not accustomed?”. “Enjoy them,” I said. There will be more news to come as this story progresses. For now, I would ask for your prayers for Don Eligio.



*This cancerous mass is painful and affects Eligio’s sight.*



***Gentle Hands that Sew to Produce the Fruits of Knowledge***

The women’s sewing group at Fairfax Presbyterian Church in Fairfax, Virginia have done it again! They sewed over 100 school uniforms for the children of Buenos Aires, ensuring that no child misses out on the opportunity to study because of lack of a uniform. There was much excitement last week as

the uniforms were finally fitted and given to the children. The uniforms more than met the requirements of white shirts with navy blue skirts or pants. It was touching to see how much detail this sewing group had put into each and every uniform. Once again, the school enrollment is up for the village. This year’s enrollment was 149 children in all for grades kindergarten through sixth! May God bless those hands that sew with so much love.



***Not Enough Green Space!***

It has been said that one is never alone in Honduras. Well, thank goodness for that! Who needs early infant stimulation when there are more than thirty neighborhood children to play with every afternoon. Certainly my kids will grow up playing with many friends. Each afternoon around 5:00 PM, the land for the coffee project is filled with the laughter of small children. There simply aren’t any green spaces for the little ones. The soccer field in the center of town is used by the “big boys”. The other central park is often filled with poor

lost young men and women who pass marijuana cigarettes back and forth. Neither place is appropriate for little kids. So, my place has become the new children’s park. I bought some cheap yard toys and the kids are so happy to play soccer, jump rope or throw Frisbees. Once in a while there is even a little scuffle over the bottle of bubble solution! Thank goodness for green grass!



***Kidnappers in Buenos Aires? Faces from Our Back Yard***

Sometimes I wonder how much I should share about the safety concerns here in Honduras. And yet, it seems as though it is important to shed light on all of the difficulties faced by those who live in Honduras and other countries of the developing world. This week, it came as quite a shock to discover

Buenos Aires. It was reported that the kidnappers had asked for the sum of one hundred thousand dollars in exchange for her safe return. Apparently, the girl’s family had negotiated a final sum of just over \$25,000.00. Thankfully, the would-be kidnappers were apprehended in a routine traffic stop on the major highway close to the girl’s home town. They were on their way to make the exchange with the girl’s family. The traffic police noticed the young girl had been crying, so they separated her from the men who were driving the car to investigate further. Taking advantage of the situation, she told the police about her quandary. She was rescued immediately and the kidnappers were taken into custody. The young girl was not injured and was returned to the welcoming arms of her parents. She said she had been treated well during her captivity.

that one of the Buenos Aires villagers was involved in the kidnapping of a fourteen year old girl. She was abducted just a few blocks away from her home as she walked to school. She had then been brought to a small house tucked away in the pine trees on the outskirts of