

Reflections From Honduras

Fellow Man International of Honduras



My neighbor Rey Peña is a great man. He is definitely a “macho man” but has been a wonderful neighbor to me. When the banditos tried to break into my house he came to my rescue, guns a blazing. When my monkey attacked me and wouldn’t let me out of the cage, Rey jumped the fence and grabbed that little guy by the scruff of the neck and said, “on the count of three...run”. And I did! He is a gentle man on most occasions bearing a striking resemblance to Grizzly Adams.

However, the day Rey came to my gate with tears in his eyes and his giant hands trembling, I knew something was terribly wrong. He explained that his mother was sick and could not get out of bed. He wondered would I come over to take a look at her. He said he hated to bother me but he had spent all of the money he had on doctors and tests and treatments to no avail. I was fairly certain there would be nothing I could offer, but readily agreed to at least speak with Doña Julia.

It was obvious at first glance that she was a very sick woman. It didn’t take long before I sent her off to the hospital to see a friend of mine who is an internist. Soon, it was discovered that Doña Julia had cancer. She had a large accumulation of liquid in her abdomen because her cancer was everywhere, affecting all of her internal organs. I called Dr. Madrid, who is our President of Projimos and a general surgeon, to see if he would be willing to drain the liquid from her abdomen while arrangements were made to convert her small adobe bedroom into a makeshift hospital room for hospice care. The goal would be to keep her comfortable and stable until her family members could come to see her.

I was grateful to so many during those difficult days of caring for Doña Julia. I was glad to have a hospital bed that could be moved into different positions to accommodate her growing belly. I was thrilled to have an oxygen generator which kept her from feeling air hungry. But most of all I was grateful to just “be here”.

When Rey came into his mother’s room after we got all of the hospital equipment arranged, he looked at me with such tired, worried eyes. I asked him if he was pleased with the arrangement and he nodded. But then, he came very close and whispered into my ear, “how much will all of this cost”. My heart ached for this man who was torn at the sight of his once vibrant mother now broken by disease. I whispered back, “it will cost one coca-cola...I’m thirsty”. I knew Rey did not have any more money. His wife had confessed they had spent all of their savings on MRI’s and CT scans to discover the source of the cancer.

Doña Julia only lived two weeks after the discovery of her cancer. Her death was peaceful. As her breathing became more labored, I told Rey that now was a good time to give his mother permission to die. I was amazed at the gentleness of his calloused hands as he cupped his mother’s face and told her he was going to be fine and to just let go. That seemed to be all she was waiting to hear.

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After the family had a moment to say goodbye, it was my turn to provide one last service for Doña Julia. Because there are no mortuary services available in our small villages, the job of embalming falls upon me or our staff physician. It wasn’t easy to make a woman as sick as Julia look well, but the family seemed to be pleased. As I returned home that night and prepared my prayers, I was overwhelmed with gratitude. Thank you to each and every one of you who have given so generously from your hearts, allowing me to remain in this place and take care of God’s children. I am so grateful to be able to share God’s love on your behalf. May His blessings be abundant and may His peace fill your hearts. Thank you so very much for your generosity.

Trick or Treat? Vampire Bats Take Up Residence in the Clinic



It didn't take long with the intense heat of summer to notice the stench that was coming from the recovery area. There also seemed to be a black goo which ran down the wall and could not be identified. Soon, there were black dung beetles crawling around the clinical areas! We had a big problem. Bats had taken up residence in the false ceiling of the clinic. If one banged on the ceiling tiles, you could hear the chatter of what seemed to be millions of bats. How in the world would we rid ourselves of this problem and the health risks associated with the bat guano that was accumulating? No one seemed to have a good answer.

After consulting with several exterminators in San Pedro Sula, it became very apparent that no one would be willing to rid the clinic of the bats. Some of the local people suggested garlic, but that remedy seemed to border on superstition. There was fairly good evidence to support the theory that the bats were vampire bats. Augustine, the mission's agricultural worker had noticed at times our hogs had small cuts on their bodies which continued to bleed throughout part of the day.

Vampire bats feed during the night. They have razor sharp teeth that open the victim's flesh without much if any pain. Their saliva contains an anti-coagulant which prevents the wound from clotting. This was why the hogs wounds continued to bleed, long after the bats had drunk their fill. Worst of all, bats are carriers of rabies and their dung can grow a fungus which causes a serious disease called Histoplasmosis. Something had to be done...and soon.

So, when Doris Bedinger and Bret Wallace were planning their trip to Honduras, they asked if there were any special pro-

jects that needed to be done. Boy, did we have a deal for them. Doris quickly jumped on the internet and began to learn all she could about the eradication of bats. Soon she was ordering masks and hazmat suits. She learned about how to make one way traps that would allow the bats to go out but not come back in. Bret agreed to the challenge and tried his best to seem excited as he put on his hazmat suit in search of bats. Thankfully, there were only a few bats. With the bats gone and the guano cleaned up, things are finally back to normal and smelling much better!



Pictured here are Bret Wallace and Doris Bedinger. Only the best of friends would be willing to don hazmat suits in search of bats in one's belfry. Thank you!

Midlife Men on a Mission Return to Buenos Aires

For several years now, Fairfax Presbyterian Church has sent a mission group to Honduras called the **Midlife Men on a Mission**. They work on a project in the Entrance to Copan but make time to come to the clinic for a day. Every year, the Midlife Men bring much needed medications for the pharmacy. They have also raised money for the general operating expenses of the mission. It is always a pleasure and a joy to have the men with us.



Members of the Midlife Men on a Mission visited the mission bringing with them an abundant supply of medications. They also brought over 100 sets of school uniforms that the women's sewing group from Fairfax Presbyterian made for the local school children

This year, several of the men stayed behind after the day trip to help work on the new school building. They already knew how to mix concrete by hand as well as how to lay block. Several new layers of block were added to the school building while they were here. The foreman in charge of the school construction commented after the visit, "those guys work hard...they can come back any time they want to". On behalf of those who are sick and the children who dream of an education, we would like to say thank you!

School Supplies - From One Kid to Another With Love



Every year around the beginning of February, parents begin to worry about how they will send their children to school. The Honduran ministry of Education stipulates that every child who goes to school must provide their own school supplies and uniform. With the average family size of six, this can be a significant financial burden on those parents who do not make enough money to even feed their families.

Chandra Cooper and the vacation bible school children of First Presbyterian Church in Salina, Kansas had an idea that perfectly combined the need with the desire to help, promoting good will and friendship between children of two different countries. Last summer, Chandra and the kids in vacation bible school assembled school supply packets for each child enrolled in the grade school of Buenos Aires. Each packet contained everything that a child would need. Pencils, pens, notebooks, scissors, glue, crayons as well as a pair of flip flop shoes were enclosed in a ziplock bag as a gift for each child. Even better were the pictures of the

children who helped to assemble the school supply packets. A personal note was included with each bag, as well as a picture of the child who donated the school supplies. The kids of Buenos Aires had great fun looking at the faces of their U.S. school buddies. There was some teasing that went on when girls got pictures of boys and vice versa. As the children stood in line to receive their school packets there were shouts that rang out, "show me your kid" and "what pretty hair or eyes". The kids carefully placed the hand-written notes along with the pictures of their "buddy" back into the plastic bags for safe keeping. It was very touching to translate the words of the bible school children. Many shared their interests and family details. The children from Buenos Aires tried very hard to remember the names of their buddies as they repeated over and over the strange English names. Many children wrote words of encouragement such as "have a great school year". It seems safe to say they most surely will! Thank you so much!



New School Uniforms - No Sweat Stains Here, Just Love in Every Stitch



If you give Lynne Thompson of Fairfax Presbyterian Church a sewing task, she is very likely to take it seriously. When the problem with the cost of school uniforms was presented to Lynne and the women's sewing group, they decided they could make all 100 plus uniforms needed to ensure that no child was denied an education because his/her parents could not afford to buy one. The school year for Honduras begins in Mid-February. Messages were sent to the parents of the grade school children that the uniforms would be made available. As the first week of school began, the children arrived in everything from new school uniforms and new shoes to rags and bare feet. It's hard to imagine what it must feel like to be a poor child who just wants to go to school. This year, the kids were all smiles as they started the new school year off right! God bless the loving hands that sewed such beautiful clothes.

Fellow Man International provides an extra teacher to the grade school in Buenos Aires because enrollment has greatly increased. Pictured here is teacher Noelia Villela, fitting children for their new uniforms. Now every child has a very nice uniform to wear to school.



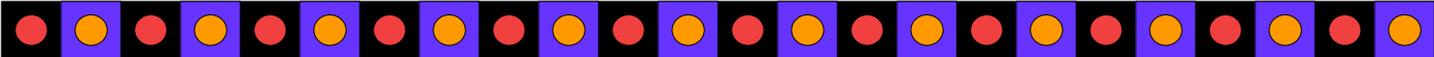
Tragedy on the Mountain - It Did Not Have to Happen



The headlines read, “Deadly Trip” and then “Two Women and One Child Die in Vehicle Turnover”. There is no way to express the true nature of what happened on the mountain road that day. As I answered my cell phone, Cruz, the mission’s agronomist’s voice sounded very strange. “There has been an accident Lisa. There are children. I don’t know what to do.” I grabbed my keys and ran out the door. Accidents happen frequently on the treacherous roads leading from the mountain villages to the valley below. More than once, our emergency room has been filled to capacity with injured people who have been thrown from the beds of the local transportation trucks. The trucks are poorly maintained and frequently lose their brakes on the steep mountain paths. I knew from the sound of Cruz’s voice it might be bad, but nothing could have prepared me for what I was about to encounter.

The vehicle, driven by a twenty-year-old man had gone off of the edge of the mountain, flipping over several times until it came to rest against a huge pine tree. There were people strewn about starting from the road, all the way down into the ravine below. Their injuries were severe. But what took my breath away were the children. Cruz was covered with blood and he was holding a child in his arms.

The little boy had a severe head injury. There were three small children, no more than six years of age, who ran toward me screaming that their “mamita was dead”! One little boy clutched on to me and asked, “what am I going to tell my papa...he’s going to be worried”. Their screams were so desperate and they were so frightened. I quickly took a look at each one and sent them to the truck so that they didn’t have to bear witness to the chaos below. As I made my way down into the ravine, it was hard for me to make out what I was seeing. Two legs were sticking out from beneath the bed of the truck. I still find it strange to note that what I remember most about that photo I will have forever captured in my mind, is that the woman was wearing a pair of underwear just like a pair I had at home. She was already deceased, crushed beneath the weight of the truck. There was another older woman whose body was twisted and broken. She was also deceased. Close to her, was another little boy who was also dead. In that moment, there was nothing I could do for those who had died so senselessly, but perhaps we could save some of the others. We grabbed wooden boards from the truck’s bed and used them to carry the injured to the road. By the time we removed some of the injured from the ravine below, the local television station was already on the scene filming. As you can see from the Newspaper pictures, Hondurans do not put rose-colored lenses on any of the pictures they choose to publish. Many people were trying to help. One



Tragedy on the Mountain - continued

merchant from Pinalejo who is known to be a good Christian and responsible community member approached me. He offered his truck to transport the injured. I was grateful because there were nine critically injured people who needed to be taken to the public hospital in San Pedro Sula. I was most concerned about the little boy with the head injury. His respirations were shallow and labored. I wondered if we would make it in time to save him. He stopped breathing two times on the way to the hospital, but thanks to some left-over supplies that were sent by some kind medical institution, (which one I do not know), we were able to support the little boy's breathing until we arrived at the hospital.

As we made our way through the crowded streets of San Pedro Sula, honking and flashing our lights, I was deeply touched by a man who was driving a very nice new Ford pickup truck. As we were stopped at the light, he got out of his truck, purchased cold water from a street vender and gave it to the people in the beds of the trucks who were well enough to receive it. He then put his truck in the middle of the intersection and waved us through. We will never know his name, but we were so grateful for his kindness.

The public hospital in San Pedro Sula is always overcrowded. Many times it takes hours for patients to be seen. There are guards at the door for pediatric emergencies and they frequently keep people from entering if the waiting room is too full. I was worried that we might have to wait to be seen. The little boy with the head injury could not wait. Thankfully though, the back door was open. I stuck my head inside and grabbed the first pediatric resident I could find. Recognizing the gravity of the situation,

He quickly called the chief pediatrician in charge of emergency services. Before we knew it, expert medical care was finally within our grasp. I couldn't help but wonder what this child's destiny would be. There were critically ill children everywhere. Parents were standing at the head of their children's beds, pumping ambu bags because there were not enough respirators to go around. One baby appeared to be dead already, but no one seemed to notice. His poor father just kept squeezing the ambu bag until someone could come around to inform him of his child's death.

After I left the pediatric emergency room, I checked on the adult patients. Surgeons were trying to decide who would get surgery first while radiology tech's wheeled others away for tests. There was nothing more that could be done. About that time, Cruz called to say that our mission physician, Carlos Romero was sending another child to San Pedro with belly pain. It was a little five-year-old girl who's mother had been killed in the accident. Cruz and I met at the entrance to San Pedro Sula so that I could return to the hospital with the little girl. The pediatrician suspected the child had a lacerated liver, but there was no one to do an ultrasound or CT scan. The only remedy was to take her out of the public hospital and drive her to a private hospital for the necessary tests. I have never been so glad for donations as I was that day. I couldn't take the pain away from the loss of her mother, but I was able to get the proper care for her. She stayed with me for three days until her father was able to come for her after the burial of his wife/her mother. While there are no happy endings for this story, I am so thankful for so much that made things better that day. Reliable transportation, generous financial gifts so that medical care could be made available and the privilege to just "be here"



Hidden From View - One Family's Struggle with Abject Poverty



Words could never express the deep aching I felt in my heart as I climbed the hill in search of Erica's parents (see July's newsletter *The*

Face of Hunger). My journey had taken me to a small village very close to the Guatemalan border called El Liston. All I had to guide me to the family's residence was the father's first name. It was Isabel. When Isabel gave Erica to me to be taken to a feeding center, I had promised to come to the family home for a visit hoping to understand the nature of the problem that led to Erica's severe malnutrition. It didn't take long to see what was wrong.

It is a common story of life here in the mountains. Young women with no education and no way to defend themselves marry much older men for reasons of security. They soon find themselves with four or five children, living in abject poverty. They



This little boy is five years old and weighs 24 pounds. He has chronic asthma and frequent lower respiratory infections.

sometimes become overwhelmed and abandon the family. Such was the case in this family.

The mother was thirty years old and the father was sixty-three. One day Isabel came home to find that his wife had left him with five children all under the age of eleven. Isabel was faced

with a terrible dilemma. If he were to go to work, clearing land of brush or to clean the coffee fields, he would have to leave his oldest daughter of eleven in charge of the household. If he were to stay at home to take care of the children, there would be no food for the table. Isabel did the only thing he could do. He went back to work.

The eldest daughter has done her best to keep the family going. She has many chores to do. There is no running water, so she must carry five gallon buckets up and down a steep hill from the creek below to house above. There is no latrine. This family is forced to take care of their physical necessities among the bushes close to the house. Cooking is especially difficult with only one metal pan to use for boiling corn and a few plastic bowls here and there. It is a terrible thing to see the tired eyes of a sixty-year-old woman in the gaze of an adolescent girl. The house consists of one room constructed

from the leftover backs and bark of pine trees. It provides little shelter for this family of six as there are wide gaps between the boards. Inside the home there is one small twin bed with twine for a mattress and one hammock. The children all sleep together on the twin bed while Isabel sleeps in the hammock. It is a tragic situation that breaks my heart despite the fact that I have seen poverty before.

There may be some hope at the end of the story. On the 14th of March, First United Methodist Church in Chanute will be bringing a mission team of young people. The plan is to build a latrine, construct a water holding tank for washing clothes and dishes, bring water to the house by way of a hand pump and perhaps rebuild the family's home. At the very least, we will close the gaps so that the family has refuge from the rain and wind. This Easter, we hope to share the love of Christ with those who need Him most!



Take Our Hand - Together We Can Make A Difference

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Love in Action for the Benefit of Our Fellow Man

A Horse for Lisa



I have owned horses since I was thirteen years old. The longest I have ever been without a horse to ride was when I came to Honduras. It wasn't long though before I found a beautiful Andalusian horse to buy from a local horse trader. I named him Cervantes since his bloodline was from Spain. I participated in ribbon races as a member of a riding team from Pinalejo. Since I was the only girl that ever rode ribbon races, the announcer always had a good time with me. He would say, "and here comes the gringa, if she leaves the ribbon behind she will have to dance with the ugliest man in town tonight". It was my escape and a way for me to be just another regular person in town...not a missionary, not

the person who solves all of the problems of the poor...just plain ole Lisa from Kansas. But when my horse died this summer, I thought I would never own a horse again, at least until my children were grown. I didn't think that I could justify such a luxury. Little did I know that one of my favorite patient's family was planning a surprise. After a ten month battle with cancer, Canuta Vasquez died on the 9th of January. I would surely miss going to her house every day. Even though she was in great pain her smile always gave me such joy. Her son Marcos said that the family felt they would never be able to repay the favor for being able to keep their mother at home until the end. They had purchased a Paso Fino colt as an expression of their gratitude. Marcos said, "we knew if we gave you a horse, you would know we were really grateful". I was touched beyond words. God is Good!