

Medical Mission ~ Guatemala, October 2013 ~ Laurie Beaupre



October 2013 was the first time I traveled to Guatemala to work with the Mission of Love Foundation. On this journey to Tecpan Kathy Price and a team of 5 volunteers from U.S. including Dr. Kathy and Tom Nelson with their Grandson Frank, Nurse Laurie Flowers and Susan Boone from the U.S. along with Eileen James and myself from Canada. Flor and Edwin Marroquin live in Tecpan and work hand in hand with the Mission of Love and Way-bi Foundation. Our mission was to bring medical provisions to a community of people that otherwise have never been treated or even examined by a medical doctor.

This was also the first Mission of Love that combined efforts with Way-bi volunteers so that we could support and treat a much larger number of patients. I will never forget this exceptional group of people who gave their hearts and souls to people that was in need. Each volunteer worked tirelessly to accommodate the number of patients that needed treatment. On the first day we opened the clinic after lunch and managed to treat 87 patients before going for dinner that night. People were lined up on the road as we arrived and there were patients being treated long after dark. These people were waiting in the chill of the night air and quite often having a long walk home on a winding dark road so that they could be looked at by a doctor and perhaps bring home medicine for themselves and their children.

We set up a waiting area outside the clinic so people could rest, children could play games and they could all have a snack while they wait in turn to be treated. We stayed into the evening each day until each and every person had been treated by a doctor. Most patients went home with medicines ranging from daily

vitamins and aspirin to walking sticks, talking watches and calculators for the blind. At the end of 4 days we treated over 500 patients.

The mission to Guatemala was medical but there were so many other opportunities to be of service to the Mayan people and to learn about their culture and way of life. On one occasion when the clinic was running at its optimum Kathy asked Eileen, Tom, Edwin and I to accompany her for an afternoon to visit some families that had special needs. The family that we visited has 7 out of 13 family members that are blind.

The drive took us through parts of Tecpan that we had not yet seen. The roads were very bumpy and winding along cliff edges and through farmer's fields. We stopped at the side of the road where there was a farmer selling his fruit & vegetables from the back of his pickup truck. The farmer cut open some fresh pineapple for us all to taste. This was the freshest, best tasting fruit I had ever eaten. There was something so special in those few minutes eating pineapple on the side of the road. I can still feel the profound simplicity of peace and joy that each one of us was feeling. We purchased a few bags of fruit from the farmer for the family we were going to visit. Quilts were brought for each individual family member. We also brought bags of food consisting of flour, rice, sugar, pasta and cooking oil.

Kathy was communicating a business idea with this family to include them in a mushroom producer's co-op that has members from 4 villages of Tecpan. This would supply the family a way of making more income by producing, packaging and selling different types of mushrooms. I'm certain the conversation did not end at that moment. I will be curious to find out how the family is doing with the mushroom co-op.

On another day we visited a family that literally lived on the edge of a cliff. They lived in a one room house that was on the side of the road and about 20 feet from the edge of a steep cliff. The father was away at work to support his wife and 6 children. The wife earned about \$1.50/day but had to leave her children at home to go out and work. They didn't have any water or light and lived in unimaginable conditions. On the spot Kathy offered the wife the equivalent wage she earned each day at work to stay home and look after her young children. As we left her home that day we went away giving the family hope for a better future with a plan to build them a home in the near future.

The second last day was set up to have a fiesta at the Way-bi farm. There were piñatas, sports, swings and trampolines for the children. We handed out bags of food and toys for the families. The entire day was filled with smiles, laughs and fun for everyone. There were hot dogs on the BBQ, snacks and cake. I will never forget that day, it was magic!

The same day as the fiesta we were invited to a Mayan full moon ceremony. In order to get to the sacred site we had to walk through the jungle about ¼ mile. As we walked in it was just starting to get dark. The fire was started and we all sat down around it and the ceremony began. Some of what was said was translated but there was much that was spoken in Mayan. The ceremony was beautiful and the energy so powerful. At one point we danced around the fire and the fire seemed to dance with us. It was perfect; you didn't need to understand the words to feel the energy that was present.

When the ceremony was over we had an adventurous walk back to the road in the pitch dark. We left in small groups and those who had cell phones with a flashlight would lead and guide the way for the group.

On our last night in Tecpan the Mission of Love and Way-bi volunteers went out to dinner to a nice steak house nearby. The drive to the restaurant was fun, more than 50 of us piled into a school bus to go to the restaurant. It was a wonderful time with great food and of course lots of smiles fun and laughs. It was a wonderful way to finish up the week.

There is much more to share about this trip but I chose a few occasions that stuck out for me personally. There were times that we couldn't hold back the tears but there are many more occasions for smiles, laughter and joy. We all worked hard and we were always tired at the end of each day. To meet those who have little or NOTHING and to see their appreciation and feel their love is one of the best experiences we could ever have.

As I was reading some of the other testimonials I realized all the volunteers share the same thing in common. We all return home changed people. To touch the lives of people who are truly in need opens us up to a different perspective and appreciation for life and love that we haven't yet experienced. This experience has changed my life. I believe this trip to Guatemala has given me greater purpose and clarity than ever before. This was my first trip to Guatemala but certainly isn't my last. I left a piece of my heart in Tecpan and I can't wait to go back.

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