

# **SewHope Trip Report June 27 – August 9, 2011**

## **Participants:**

Anne Ruch, Randy Ruch, Deena Ellis, LeighAnn Meinecke (teacher), Sara Meinecke (translator – age 22) , Laura Ruch (college student – age 21)

**Flights!** - A new twist on this trip! Our first flight into Guatemala City was diverted to El Salvador where we stayed on the runway for 3 hours until the rain in Guatemala improved.

Then, a TACA flight was cancelled due to rain and Laura was unable to make it to Flores and Randy was unable to get back to Guate the night before his early flight. Laura ended up somehow meeting Kate Feinbusch (from Concern America!) who let her use her phone to call me. It turned out OK and she stayed in a nice hotel financed by TACA but for the future, it would be nice for people to have a phone to use when they arrive in Guatemala City. Randy ended up making his flight the next morning just in the nick of time!

## **General changes in community**

Women come out of homes more and interact in much more positive ways  
Community leaders clearly feel more empowered as evidenced by their independent decision to go to Human Rights Commission Office and Ministry of Education when problems came up with Concepcion

Mothers express to Orfe that they are extremely grateful for the lessons (about health, morals, education) we are teaching their children.

Teens in high school sponsorship program are clearly interested in a future and seem to be among the few not “married” and pregnant.

Wonderful relationship with Ismael and Orfe – planning on classes in “marriage enrichment” soon. They are clearly highly respected and loved by the community. Continues with high rate of pregnancy. Even those who are using contraception are getting pregnant – hormones dispensed in clinic in Mango do not seem to be effective.

Still a strong element of traditional beliefs. Difficult to change thinking about the danger of water contamination. While we reinforce at each clinic visit that the cause of many of the health problems is the lack of “agua pura”, only a few people want to buy the water filters. However, some are starting to believe it and there are even some people who come from other villages to buy one. The cost is very cheap and affordable.

Many women continue to believe that their health catastrophies (stillborn babies, childhood death, etc) are the results of the “susto”. Susto is what happens when you experience a terrible “fright”. One woman described seeing a large snake in her home which terrified her while she was pregnant and her baby immediately died. Another woman witnessed a murder and then she had chronic back pain.

**Administrative:**

Anne, Randy and Deena shopped in Antigua during the first day to purchase many beautiful items for the SewHope LEAP even next February.

**Bank account** – Found out that as American citizens, we can have bank accounts so I opened one. Anne and Ismael are signers on the account now. Q500 was deposited

**NGO status:**

The director of “WINGS Guatemala” referred us to an attorney to help us get our non-profit status in Guatemala. He is:

Rudolpho Valenzuelo

[chofovz@yahoo.com](mailto:chofovz@yahoo.com)

4070-5224

I have already been in contact with him by email and he has forwarded all the necessary documents which will be sent to Kathie Kolodgy for review.

**“WINGS Guatemala”** This is an NGO working in the area of Women’s Health. They work with APROFAM (similar to Planned Parenthood) in the area of family planning and they train health promoters to do VIAA (Visual Inspection with Acetic Acid) and arrange for cervical cancer screening jornadas using mobile units. Anne and Deena met their director (Janeen Simon) for approximately one hour and exchanged contact information for possible collaboration in the future. Jenna also provided us with the name of a Guatemalan attorney who worked with them to get their NGO status. She also contacted Dr. Elizabeth Contreras (Guatemalan Medical Director of APROFAM) who then emailed and called me. She is extremely interested in our work and seemed shocked that we do not have a place to do surgeries. She promises to find a place for us (possibly in Poptun). They have mobile clinics that do tubal ligations and we might be able to participate with that. I discussed our Cervical cancer research plan for next February and she is interested in hearing more about it and assisting us. We discussed possibly developing a school for midwives and for cyto technologists in the Peten. She and I will correspond by email. She also let their 2 employees in the Peten region (closer to the Mexican border) know about our work. We discussed the huge problem with maternal death and she is again interested in working with us on this.

**CATIE:** Anne, Deena, Ismael and Orfe had a 3 hour meeting with the director of CATIE ([jcruz@catie.ac.cr](mailto:jcruz@catie.ac.cr)) in the Peten regarding future collaboration. He was extremely enthusiastic about a future relationship and is going to give us a “letter of intent” to clarify our working relationship together.

CATIE is a Scandinavian organization committed to improving agricultural techniques and restoring deforested land. They have previously worked with Orfe in putting in the “hortilizas” last year (30 in Pueblo Nuevo and 120 in Mango). They contributed approximately Q30,000 to that work last year. While they do not have the funding to continue this this year, they are willing to work with us in providing

technical expertise and equipment such as the use of tractor for 20 days. They explained their program of finding “promoters” in each community whom they train to work with individual families to develop a 2-3 year plan for food security. He showed us the extensive flow chart that they use. They work in the areas of hortilizas, Ramon trees, bee hives, worm composting, cow’s milk, drying fruits and vegetables, irrigation techniques to have harvests at other times of the year, and teaching good use of the land using sustainable, traditional techniques. He mentioned that we might also consider working with the “Pastoral Social” in the Peten to help us with other projects. The director gave us a copy of the extensive family evaluation and planning tool that they use.

**Bottle School** – Anne, Randy and Deena, Ismael and Orfe drove about 4 hours to visit a bottle school built by “Hug It Forward”. We met with the young man in Chachal who was the local leader working with Chris to build the bottle school there. He was extremely enthusiastic about the construction of the school (a BASICO school) in terms of both how it brought the community together and has greatly improved opportunities for the community. However, because it is a government school, there are still no books and we noticed that it is poorly taken care of in terms of cleanliness. He described the building process to us and Randy had a good chance to look at the structure.

Anne and Randy have had continued communication with Zach Balle and Chris and we will forward them our application for a school as it is being completed. Randy will be writing the grant proposal for funding and they will help us with ideas for fundraising and will help the community with technical support.

### **Community meetings:**

June 28 – Anne, Deena and Orfe had a 2 hour meeting with the women’s leadership group in Pueblo Nuevo. Discussed issues regarding failure of teachers to come to school; finding ways to feed the preschool children with the KAH food; how they can participate in the KAH program. We discussed things they could become more involved in such as putting in fences to contain animals, cooking food at school every day – even when school is cancelled due to teachers being absent., hortilizas, etc.

July 1 – COCODE community leaders met (without our group) in an emergency meeting after the school was locked by the school director, Concepcion. 2 of the community leaders (Jose and Mario) were locked in behind the fence when they had decided to help add on to the school kitchen area after the women in the community had been thrown out by Concepcion. They decided to go to the Human Rights Commission, the Ministry of Education and the newspaper (PRENSA LIBRE) with this information and they are working to remove Concepcion from his position. Later in the week, they did inform the authorities and promises were made to replace Concepcion. They are anticipating a response soon.

**Purchase of land, plans for Community Center** – Anne, Deena, Ismael and Orfe met with the COCODE regarding the school issues and the plans for the construction of a Community Center/possible private junior high school (BASICO). They are extremely eager for these. We discussed the possible options for land purchase and they felt that the best area would be the land across from the current primary school because of its proximity to the current school (so that any areas for play could be used by both), for its privacy (no neighbors), its beautiful view, the hard land (lots of stone) which would make a structure more secure, and the large amount of space available. The current owner is asking Q20,000. Because SewHope does not have NGO status yet in Guatemala, Anne and Randy are willing to purchase the land and then have it transferred into the name of SewHope once that status has been achieved.

The leaders are most anxious for a school that would not be controlled by the government since they do such a terrible job – no books, poor teachers, no community input, lack of testing, poor graduation rate, general apathy. We spent a great deal of time discussing the potential problems of SewHope financing the school because of the lack of sustainability. They discussed ways to help finance the school including putting a store/restaurant on the property and charging a small tuition. They expect that the school would be used by 4 other villages which would mean many more people visiting. The daily bus from these villages passes right by this area. Fish from the fish farms could be sold as well as the items which the women will hopefully be making with the sewing projects

Ismael and Orfe gave us a 200 page document which outlines all that would be needed to start a private school.

### **Sewing projects:**

Deena found a woman who owns a store in Flores and who weaves the characteristic Guatemalan patterns. She is willing to go out to Pueblo Nuevo to teach the women how to weave these characteristic fabrics of Guatemala. She will do this for \$2.00 per woman taught. She actually came out to Pueblo Nuevo (took several hours to get out there on several buses!) and discussed the project with Deena and Orfe.

Orfe will help us buy foot pedal sewing machines which are readily available in Guatemala. We bought traditional fabric in Antigua and Deena is going to work with a former student who sews to design a computer bag. We noticed that there are no computer bags for sale in Guatemala and this could be a great tourist sales item.

Deena had been given a donation of \$1000 by Donna Martin at a KAH packing last April and this money can be used to initiate this project.

### **Fish farms:**

Mario has completed one fish pool and the fish are on the way. No oxygenation yet – Mario doesn't think it's necessary. Randy talked about using windmill to power it.

### **KAH food:**

We visited the large storage unit at the Nazarene Center where the KAH food is being stored. We met with the pastor there who is providing us the storage unit at no cost. He and Ismael have used a small amount of the food to send to a very poor area in the Peten which the Nazarene Church supports.

While we were there, the men from the Friends of Guatemala (FOG) program near Lake Atitlan were there to pick up the boxes. They received 177 boxes which had been paid for and packed by the FOG.

We met with the women in Pueblo Nuevo about expanding the program to include pregnant and breastfeeding women as well as pre-school children. While we would like to do this in all the aldeas that receive the food, Ismael reminded us that we don't want to turn it into a welfare program encouraging people to become pregnant and that it has to part of the bigger nutrition program.

### **Gardens:**

Ismael has rented a large area (over an acre) for a women's co-op initiative. They planted 6000 tomato plants while we were there. He has invested about Q50,000 of his own money (seeds, fertilizer, pesticide, paying some workers, tools, chicken wire, wheel barrow, baskets, transportation, etc). He hopes to recuperate the money but Deena and I told him we felt this should be a SewHope project and there should be sufficient money available for funding this. Deena will talk to Rick and Anne will talk to Gloria about fund availability now. The UT golf outing money was to go for this and there should be other funds in the nutrition program.

Plans in place to help women put in more hortilizas with watermelon, pepper, cilantro, chile, jalepeno and more.

### **Education:**

Same problems continue with the school director, Concepcion. In addition to continuing to be very frequently absent (they only had school 1 day last week for no real reasons), he has:

Accused Ismael of stealing 33 books

Given Ismael letter requesting meeting with him and Orfe alone

locked the school preventing CONALFA classes for adult ed

Locked Jose and Mario in the school property

Has not used SewHope books

See above for information about what the community is doing about him.

Leigh Ann Meinecke and her daughter, Sara, had an incredible week with the children. Her report is below

OBSERVATIONS ON EDUCATION IN PUEBLO NUEVO

Each day during the week of July 3-8, 2011 we had the opportunity to meet with the children of Pueblo Nuevo. When we arrived on Monday afternoon about 50 children, a few parents, and some of the village leaders greeted us from outside the schoolyard fence because they were locked out of the school. We had the opportunity to witness the statements made in protest and the cutting of the lock off the fence. The video made will be used to file a statement with the Guatemalan government.

We were able to spend time with the school children on Monday afternoon at the school. On Tuesday-Friday we were not welcomed into the school with the exception of Thursday when we were permitted to attend a special program. It does not take long, however, to look around the school and see that the only supplies available are workbooks. My observations of the children's work as they gathered with us on the porch of the clinic later in the week emphasize the limited nature of this type of educational setting.

Each day we welcomed a steady stream of 25-30 children onto the porch of the clinic for a variety of educational activities we had brought along. I was impressed by the eagerness of the children to spend hours playing educational games and reading with us. It reinforces for me the recent research on brain development that finds that the human brain wants stimulation—we innately desire to learn and are happiest when gaining new knowledge. Sadly, the week we were in the village the teachers were present for three of the mornings—one of them being a special program regarding the news of the exhumation of two village men. That totals about 8 actual instructional hours that week.

During the course of the week Sara and I were able to do a few screenings and make some observations as we watched the children interact with the materials we had brought. The first screening which most of the children completed was to draw a self-portrait. This gives us information about manual skill, appreciation of symmetry, awareness of self and others, and ability to complete a task. When I look at the pictures as a group I see a "mechanical" nature to the drawings. Almost all start with a rectangle or a triangle for the body regardless of age. Some add details; however some of the 11-13 year olds' pictures are surprisingly void of details, and the mechanics indicate an average lag of 2-3 years in terms of perceptual awareness (i.e., the ability to notice details that differentiate characteristics.) This ability develops the skills needed for observation, for example, being able to differentiate cell structures in a microscope. Nearly all the pictures drawn look identical. Creativity does not seem to be a valued part of the curriculum. And yet it is that very imagination that can pull someone out of the cycle of poverty.

The second screening I chose to use was one in which each child is given 60 seconds to name as many animals as possible. This item from the Stanford-Binet test gives information about organization of thinking, background knowledge, comprehension, ability to categorize, and capacity to sustain attention. These are things that can also be influenced by nutrition. I had Sara run this test for me because of her fluency in

Spanish. Results are pending, but we were only able to complete about 10 screenings due to illness.

Following are some general observations made during interactions with the children. Many are reading, a few with fluency. It is difficult to tell what level they are reading at due to limited resources. There are no books in the school other than the workbooks. The books we used were picture books, which are not leveled. I also spent some time working with a few older boys trying to establish representation by drawing a picture of the building they had created from blocks. I then knocked down the building and together we rebuilt the building using the picture. Three or four of the children picked up on this idea rather quickly (they are capable!) One 8-year-old boy is possibly dyslexic; his writing includes many reversals, which is not common at his age. It is also possible that he simply spends so much time copying letters that he has learned them backwards. I wonder if the teachers are aware of this possibility and if anything special is being done for him. Almost all of the students seem to be lacking in background knowledge and awareness of the world beyond their village. Making a variety of appropriate books available would address this issue.

On Friday as some leaders (Don Jose, Mario, et. al.) gathered for a meeting with Anne, I had an opportunity to explain the activities we were doing and why they are important for development. Parents and leaders from the village seemed very interested and some even joined in the activities with the children. It could benefit the children to plan more sessions like that in the future. If the teachers in the public school are not interested, perhaps the people from Pueblo Nuevo will take initiative.

As I said earlier, these children seem very eager to learn. They deserve teachers who engage them in activities that go beyond the workbook level of learning. This type of learning does little to go beyond the lowest levels of understanding on Bloom's taxonomy of learning domains, which are memorization and understanding. I do not see much evidence of analyzing, critical thinking, and creativity in the children's skill sets. I am hopeful that the new community center can serve as a place to gather and store materials. Then perhaps we can start to address the need for a library of books and resources that will help them learn to strategize, think critically, and create.

Respectfully submitted,  
Leigh Ann Meinecke  
7/14/11

## **Clinic:**

The clinic has progressed dramatically in terms of organization. We have excellent charts with good records. The filing cabinets and 3 desks which were sent on the last shipment are extremely helpful. We have excellent histories on all patients who have previously been seen and the current forms are very helpful for our translators to use to get good histories before the doctors see the patients. Laura and Deena did an excellent job getting all the information so that the patients could be seen efficiently and all their problems could be addressed. The 2 ultrasound machines arrived without problem and one is in storage while the other is at the clinic. The picture on it is great quality and the only problem is that it is lacking a printer which we will hopefully be able to get in the future. The patients are delighted to have access to ultrasound and are more than willing to pay the Q20 that we charge. They would pay Q200 in the surrounding clinics for poor quality ultrasounds.

The generator that Coral's family bought is EXCELLENT! Thank you!!!

We have a running Excel file on anyone who has ever had a pap so it is easy to retrieve results for any patient. All patients who have abnormal paps are immediately notified and they return for follow-up at our next visit which has been about every 1-3 months. We are currently using the cautery machine to treat high grade lesions and have the capacity to do LEEP in the clinic. We still do not have easy access to nitrous oxide for cryotherapy. The only company which has it is in Guatemala City and they only have large tanks. Because we do not have large numbers of women needing treatment, the current system is working sufficiently for now.

Women come for prenatal checks every time we are there. We have good records and are able to educate them about potential warning signs and when they should go to hospital. Having the ultrasound is very useful for finding abnormalities which would warrant delivery at hospital.

We are able to check all patients for blood sugar, hematocrit, blood pressure, weight, height, ultrasound.

We are well stocked with sufficient medications. At end of this report are needs for the next trip.

Work with health promoters: 2 of the local health promoters and one of the midwives came to the clinic (from Pueblo Nuevo and Purusila). I gave them deworming medicine, folic acid, bandages, bandades, and tape. I also gave the promotor from Purusila copies of all the paps from the women in her community which she was extremely grateful for. They said that they would be eager to work with us in the future and Ismael will contact them before the next trip.

Women were extremely grateful for Jobst stockings. 5 pairs were given out including a pair given to a woman in Flores who approached us because she paid

quite a bit for a pair at Hospital Shalom that did not fit her. Severe varicosities are a huge problem and the opportunity to have Dr. Gale (vascular surgeon from Toledo) and his team come to do a week of CLOSURE surgeries would be welcome.

We had purposely not extensively advertised this trip because I was the only health care provider and we had many issues to address on this trip. Laura, Deena and myself spent extensive time with each patient allowing us to learn much about their health and community issues.

Reasons for clinic visits:

Pregnancy – continues to be too common!

Menstrual problems

Skin lesions and one possible cancer (biopsy taken)

Severe varicosities

Urinary Tract infections

Gastroenteritis (probable dysentery)

Headaches, back pain

Yeast, scabies, bacterial vaginosis

Breast mass (possible cancer – fine needle aspiration done)

Paps

Massive cellulitis on leg after a large laceration was sutured in clinic in Mango

Cuts and scrapes after a boy fell

We talked with Jose about possible purchase of the “clinic” building from his son who lives in the U.S. His son does not seem eager to sell it at less than \$42,000 which seems extremely high. We have full access to it for an indefinite amount of time for now so there is no urgency. The main negative is that we are not able to leave our things there between trips for security reasons and that we cannot make certain changes to it which would make it more usable. Also, we would ultimately like to have it open at all times.

## **High School Sponsorship**

Met with all students. They expressed tremendous gratitude and some even came to me later with tearful eyes asking me to thank all the donors.

Reviewed their grades. The students' grades are generally poor but passing and a great improvement from 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter. They expressed that they would be eager to have a “BASICO” school in Pueblo Nuevo since the travel is so much every day.

I gave them books to read which they will share.

They asked for books about motivational stories (Rigoberta Menchu), Carazamba, books written by Virgilio Rodriguez Macal

Currently enrolled:

**Basico School (grades 7, 8, and 9)**

Erick Lucero Moreno

Gilberto  
Irma  
Karina  
Mario  
Marleny  
Lidia  
Christina

### **High School**

Carla Beatriz Lucero Moreno  
Estela Jesus Lucero Morales  
Norma Maribel Morano Cruz  
Reuben Aceitona

### **Flori**

This is a very difficult story to tell which is incredibly heartbreaking. There was a great deal of emotion throughout the trip regarding her horrible situation. Flori and her sister unexpectedly came out to the clinic the 2<sup>nd</sup> day we were there. I don't even know how she made the bus ride or why she didn't just have us bring her. She is in incredible pain and was extremely grateful for the morphine which I brought which should last. It did seem to provide her with immediate relief although the last conversation I had with her was again gut-wrenching because of her terrible misery and her great fear for her children. Randy made a 10 minute movie of her saying good-bye to her children. It is very difficult to watch and I can share it at the next board meeting. We spent time talking with her and her sister about what will happen with the children. Again, we can talk about this at our next meeting.

### **Daniel**

He and his family were delighted to see us and especially to receive the wonderful gifts from Dr. Dave Mallory. We took photos and spent a little time with them. He continues to suffer from intermittent infections but the decubitus ulcer is still fairly well healed. He struggles with leg spasms and I will look into finding out if anything can be done about that since it is terribly bothersome to him. I brought about 30 colostomy bags but they are in need of a steady supply.

### **Exhumation of body from Pueblo Nuevo**

A very surprising event that we were privileged to participate in was the excavation of the body of the husband of one of the women in Pueblo Nuevo. He had been killed randomly in the 28 year civil war and his exhumation was part of a government program to give retribution to the families who suffered loss of loved ones (200,000 were killed during the genocide). I will send you all the video movies and pictures we have of this. Involved was a large team of 2 archaeologists, 2 forensic scientists,

a psychologist, numerous policemen and others. It was featured on the Guatemala news which we also have a video of. The community was anxious to include us in this very sacred event and actually invited us into the area where only the family was allowed to go. Orfe was the person who initiated this process and she is also the one who established the cemetery in Pueblo Nuevo.