

## TRIP REPORT-JUNE 2012

Coral and Brent Matus

The Martinez family was kind enough to open their home to us this week. Ismael had invited us to stay in their home while we were there, and I knew that Brent would LOVE being with Jessi and the other boys, so we accepted. Their home is small but neat, with 4 bedrooms, a kitchen, and living room. They gave us the (only) air-conditioned room. Orfe cooked for us each morning, and a couple of the evenings as well. We seemed to manage just fine with 8 people and 1 bathroom, although that would never work at my house! (I guess it helps that there were more males than females). It was reaffirmed to me this week what a kind, loving, and Godly family they are. The boys are all so polite and respectful, and they are all so helpful, especially with Kathryn.

The first task of the week, and my main goal, was to further plans for the birthing center in El Chal. We met with a group of leaders in the morning, and spent a couple of hours just talking about plans, questions, potential problems, and how to proceed. The main leader, Carlos, has been so helpful and enthusiastic about the project. He has definitely thought through some of the potential problems, and has much insight into the needs of the community. Three members of the COCODE (local governing body) were there also, and had some questions, but also seemed very supportive of the project. Of course, Catalin, and 3 other promoters were there, each of whom are training with her to learn to be comedronas. They all seem very excited and motivated by the idea of a birthing center in their community, and say that it will be life-changing for the women in the area. For Catalina, it is a “sueño”! After meeting in their “salon” (community center), we went to survey the land. We talked about the best way to utilize the land, and how best to position the center. We talked about leaving some room in the front for parking (Carlos thought there should be 7 or 8 parking spaces so that when people come from far away, they have a place to park!). We measured out and marked off the location of the center, and I could begin to imagine the center right on that location. Of course, there is much work to do between now and then, but it is exciting to begin to see things taking shape. Part of the group (Carlos, Catalina, and one of the promoters along with the Martinez family, Brent, and I) then went shopping to check prices of some of the building materials we would need. Carlos guided us to the 2 “tiendas” that he thought would be best, and we got a price list of the necessary items. After a quick stop at Sarita’s for “lunch”, we headed back to the Martinez home in the late afternoon for an evening of high order math as we began to calculate the amount of materials we would need and approximately what the cost would be. Although we still have a few missing pieces, we do have a good idea of the funds that will be needed and the materials we will need. By 11:30, our brains had had enough, but we were well on our way. The conclusion: a little more fund raising...

Wednesday was clinic day in Santa Ana. With Orfe as receptionist, we saw prenatal visits and a few paps. Despite playing the role of nurse, lab tech, and physician, I enjoyed the day and was able to chat with the women who came. As always, each woman represents a story of tragedy and heartbreak. Young teenagers of 15 years who are pregnant for the first time, an 18-year old who is pregnant with her second child, but her husband is working in Guatemala City and she doesn’t know when he will return, a 30-year old who has 7 children at home, has lost 3 others, and appears exhausted and overwhelmed, and the 39 year old who is pregnant with her 11<sup>th</sup> child while her 21 year old daughter was recently murdered on June 1<sup>st</sup>, most likely by her estranged spouse. The serenity and faith that I see in their faces always amazes me. They are always so gracious, welcoming, kind, and thankful. It is always such a humbling experience to share the joy of a new life growing inside. It is satisfying if I can tell with near certainty the sex of the baby, since this is a luxury that most women never realize. For the others, just being able to measure the growth of the head and the abdomen and the leg and tell them that things are good brings a smile to their faces.

Thursday was a rainy day, but we managed to squeeze in a quick trip to Flores for Brent to “shop”, and then a short boat ride to see the island and enjoy the lake. We spent a couple hours getting some more prices for the birthing center at a couple of hardware stores. The whole concept is very overwhelming to me, since I don’t really know much

about construction in the U.S., let alone in Guatemala. And the methods they use in Guate are certainly different than those we use in the states. Thank goodness for Ismael's experience and expertise! We were scheduled to meet with some of the teachers and leaders in Purusila at 2:30 in the afternoon. In typical Guatemalan fashion, we arrived at 2:30, and waited until 3:15 for the stragglers to arrive. In the meantime, however, we received a very warm welcome and informative tour of the kindergarten school (this actually includes 4, 5, and 6 year olds). The woman who started the school actually still teaches there, and her daughter is now the director. There are 2 other teachers as well, and they are all very involved and dedicated to the school. You can see their passion for the children and their education just from talking to them for a few minutes. Finally, the men from COCODE (the local governing body) and the women from the alimentation committee arrived. The purpose of our meeting was to discuss the computer program in their community. We discussed our concerns about security (the main school, which incorporates grades 1 and up is about a 'block' away from the kindergarten, and really has no good security to lock computers. The buildings have block only about 3-4 feet up, and then chain-link screens above that. There is a room in the kindergarten building that has a security door and is completely enclosed. We also discussed concerns about people taking the computers home and the risk of them being stolen or not used for the educational purposes for which they are intended. Everyone agreed that there needed to be some tight controls on the computers and close accountability. We discussed our idea of starting with just using the computers in the kindergarten rooms. We proposed giving one computer to each of the 3 teachers to begin to explore how they would use them in their classes. The smiles on the faces of the teachers were ENORMOUS! They were so thankful and gracious, and vowed to use them for the benefit of the children. Everyone signed the contract that Ismael wrote (he should be a lawyer!), and we had a photo session to commemorate the signing outside the school! We explained our plan to bring more computers (up to 13 the first year) once the teachers and community were comfortable that they had a way to secure them and use them safely. The rest of the laptops, for now, will be used by Orfe with her group of students in Santa Ana to explore the programs and see which ones are the most useful. Those students are accustomed to using computers in school, so should be a great help in getting things going. Maricruz sends her greetings and a hug to Anne!

Other things we discussed while driving or relaxing:

1. WATER:

- a. Ismael estimates that 95% of the people who live in the "central" area of Peten (Santa Elena, Flores, San Jose, San Andres) drink purified water, which they buy in the large (5 gallon) bottles. His family spends about Q260 (\$35) per month on 24 bottles, which they use for cooking and drinking.
- b. His concern about starting a water program (purified water coming into people's homes) are:
  - i. People will be skeptical that the water really is clean
  - ii. The current system has had "dirty" water running through it for so long that it would be difficult to "purify" the pipes, etc. to truly get clean water. Would likely need to start over with infrastructure
  - iii. Concern about security of the supply (what if the water runs short during the dry season or the system can't keep up with demand? People would need to have a 'back up' source of clean water in this case)
  - iv. People may perceive that (and it may be true) this would be a more expensive option, since a typical home pays Q30 per month for the (unpurified) water that comes into their homes. In order to have purified water coming into homes, would likely cost much more, and people would view this as a waste to use purified water for things such as bathing and washing clothes.

2. Community Health Workers

- a. While Ismael believes the idea is a good one, there are some concerns/ limitations:
  - i. Many communities have difficulty working together, some for political reasons and some for other reasons. He is concerned that if we begin to pay just one person, for example, to be in

charge of cooking the food, then none of the other women will want to help or contribute wood or additional ingredients for the program. He believes that this one person will be expected to do everything, and it will discourage the community from working together.

- ii. We discussed having 2 or 3 workers, each of whom would receive a lesser amount of compensation. He thought this might work well, especially for the larger communities (Mango, for example).
- b. He thought that we might use the list of duties as a starting point and ask the community to begin working on these as a group, and then observe and identify one or two individuals who seem to be taking the role as leader, and then discuss beginning to pay them.
- c. He voiced some specific concerns about the 2 communities in which we had originally proposed to begin the program:
  - i. Monte Rico-Antonio
    1. While he seems to be an outgoing and caring man, he also seems to cause some political division in his community. Ismael has observed instances in which he has spoken badly about the government and encouraged others to do the same.
    2. There have been projects which he was meant to complete but did not, including receiving supplies from the local government to build a shade covering for the community pilas, which are all still waiting in the clinic to be constructed.
    3. While the food program in this community is going “okay”, at times when Ismael has visited, the people have shown that they are not always following the “rules”. For example, they are having difficulty getting the children to bring one stick each to build the fire each day, so sometimes the women will go and collect paper garbage from the ground to make the fire, and then they may not cook the food long enough.
  - ii. Purushila-Maracruz
    1. This young lady seems to be a very good candidate for this position, as she has proven herself to be reliable and genuinely concerned about her community.
    2. In this community, Ismael is more concerned about jealousy among the women if we pay just one and not the others
    3. This may be the best community in which to start the program, but he would like to see how things go with the computers in the next month or 2.
  - iii. Mango
    1. It appears that Orfe and Ismael have been doing quite a bit in this community, and they actually have started a system where 3 different women in various parts of the community will cook the food for the children who live nearby, so that none has to travel very far. This seems to be a good solution for this community which is a bit larger.
  - iv. El Chal
    1. This is another example of a community which is a bit larger. Currently they have 2 women who are cooking for the children, one on each side of the “highway”. Even with this arrangement, each woman is cooking for 60-80 children, and some children are travelling quite a distance to get the food.
3. The women in Cartucho (who are making the shampoo and soap) are doing quite well. They love the colored labels, and feel that it is making their product look more “professional”. They are selling quite a bit, and are actually making some money (according to Orfe). In fact, they have expanded their repertoire and are now making 2 different types of face creams, which are “organic” and are safe to use during the day and at night. (The leader was so proud to tell me this!) Isn’t it amazing what a motivated group of women with a vision can do!?

4. I took 12 computers, and brought back 2. One did not have the software loaded on it, and the other had a mouse that did not work appropriately.
5. We need to consider options for the clinic in Santa Ana if building is not eminent. Ismael reports that our "lease" is up in October, and he believes that the man who lives in the house we are renting may be thinking about coming back from the states. He believes that is why he put up the security gate in front. Need to consider alternative options if this house becomes unavailable.

Respectfully submitted  
Coral Matus