

Trip Report
Anne Ruch
September 21 – 28 2015

Politics

Definitely a true change of attitude amongst almost everyone. Ismael had previously said that he wouldn't bother voting this year because everyone was so corrupt but when the opportunity for Jimmy Morales came up, he was excited and went to the polls.

Many, many high level people are in jail.

When I took the TAG flight up to Flores, there was this guy sitting next to me. He turned on his phone and when he read the news he shouted "Ah DIOS!!" Although he didn't know me, I could see he felt he had to tell someone so he very excitedly showed me a picture of this high level judge who just got sent to jail. He said he was a lawyer and had worked with her and she was one of the most corrupt people he had ever met. He looked so joyful at the idea that someone like her could finally be brought to justice.

When I met with Isabel and her group of Rotarians, the sentiment was the same. Interesting that people from all walks of life seem to feel the same. They all readily admit that "Jimmy" has absolutely no experience in government but that's what they like the best about him. There is a fear that the current congress will keep him from passing a budget – but they will deal with that if it happens.

Meeting with Rotary

On the evening I arrived, we had a meeting with Isabel, the President of their Rotary (Gerardo), the upcoming president (Jose) and another good friend of Isabel's who has been in Rotary for many years (Margarita).

Isabel told me ahead of time that Gerardo was kind of against the project since it's so far away in Peten and he doesn't look at it as a sustainable project. Also, they generally don't fund construction projects or salaries. But by the end, he was really excited about the whole thing and they all promised they would work hard to make it happen.

I gave them a summary of the proposal and they will start the paper work. I need to find the point person from Toledo Rotary – probably the person who is in charge of International Projects.

We're going to aim for \$100,000 but as always.....we'll see..

Medical

The clinic is still as yucky as ever – I can't wait to move! But it has done its job. There were about 12 follow-up colposcopies, LEEP's and cryos and I did 140 paps. We also had a jornada in La Maquina (saw 55) and the Casa Materna (saw 35). No huge problems.

One story that kind of broke my heart was when a mom brought her daughter who is in our program. She is 16. They came because they thought she has a heart problem because she wakes up a lot with chest pain and sometimes gets it when she is at church. I did the usual exam and then talked with them about anxiety. They said the dad used to be a problem but he was better now. Then I had the mom leave and the girl – who is generally very reserved and sweet - told me that it is her mom who is really the problem. She hits her and yells all the time. Then she talked about how there are 7 kids and the parents all living in the one room house on a dirt floor. She thought I had visited there but I think it was Coral. (You know how we are the same person!). Anyway, I thought about myself at 16 and how that was hard enough! Could I ever imagine living like this girl lives? It seemed so hopeless. I actually got tearful and practically begged her not to get pregnant. I gave her the talk about

hope and a future that could be different. She seemed to be thinking all these things. It made me realize once again the tremendous work that Ismael and Orfe are doing with these children.

Tried to set up a meeting with Dr. Norman Gutierrez about him possibly working with us but we couldn't reach him. The social workers from Santa Elena agreed he would be a great choice. I'll try to contact him in November.

Casa Materna

So when I arrived, Ismael and Orfe told me that there were big problems at the Casa Materna and that Catalina had resigned! Sounded like it was mostly because she felt that ALAVI had unrealistic expectations of her and she was not about to be at the CASA every day. They had apparently come to an impasse and she wasn't even willing to deliver babies there any more. Orfe said she hadn't had the heart to tell Coral.

I almost think that Orfe and Ismael thought "Well, that's it. SewHope is no longer involved there!"

So, I asked to set up a meeting and we met with Catalina and Leandro and one of the women - sorry, I don't know her name (she's the middle aged one who wears round glasses!)

We got there and Catalina was looking pretty angry - wouldn't talk much and had her arms tightly closed. I prepared some bible verses about handling conflict and we talked about how the whole place came to fruition in the first place. I talked about how long ago, SewHope had decided that it wouldn't be "ours" and that in reality our hope was that it would really be a place where many would be blessed in the name of God.

Then I told them that I really didn't know much about their issues but I did know a lot about what it takes to give your life to delivering babies. I talked about how hard it is to be up all night and how you often can't even go to bed knowing that you will be able to have a peaceful night's sleep. Then I told them how I have always had partners and so in reality, it is so much harder for Catalina. I reminded them how I had brought up at a meeting long ago that we needed to have more midwives ultimately working there.

So then Catalina softened a lot and she said she was really sorry and she had just been angry because they wanted her to be there Monday-Friday all day. We easily came to a compromise that they would have scheduled hours and that she would put her phone number outside the clinic so that people could reach her if she was not there and a woman was in labor.

They were very excited about the idea that we might be able to find an American midwife who might go there for an extended time.

I was surprised to hear that they have only had 14 deliveries there this year. Catalina had numerous reasons for this - eg. more people want to deliver at the hospital, the birth rate is down, she is very picky about making sure that no one with any risk delivers there - still, I thought that was a low number considering she had previously told us that she was doing about 90 a year.

Also when we had our jornada there, almost all the pregnant gals that I saw (about 20) said they wanted to deliver there. They all love Catalina and she seems to know them well.

Anyway, the night after the meeting, she had a delivery and then the next day another one - makes me wonder if she just didn't want people to come there before...

So, in the end, I think that it is a work in progress and that ultimately it will grow into a great success.

Some things to follow-up on:

1. Make sure that she really is having somewhat regular designated hours
2. Consider looking for an American midwife who might spend some time there
3. Consider expanding Catalina's (or someone's) skills into things like putting in an IV in an emergency, giving Pitocin or cytotec, maybe even learning to put in a balloon in case of hemorrhage. I'm not sure that she is even checking BP's.
4. Although Catalina can't read, maybe someone else there could start keeping a prenatal record. All the women I saw got the "carnet" and some of them brought their carnet from when they saw Coral but we really should start getting them to think about regular records - at least 4 visits.

Education

I spent the first day working with the children on the computers. Most are very animated and diligent but there are clearly issues that Seiner doesn't seem to be picking up on.

Seiner is really nice and always shows up. The kids seem to respect him but he is clearly limited in what he can do. He really doesn't pick up on individual problems with students and how they could be better using the programs.

Still haven't found a second teacher. Apparently there is someone who works at Sarita that ORfe likes. She has a teaching "degree" and will be taking our little "examen" this week.

Personally, the more I see there, the more I'm inclined to push for an American to do a 6-12 month stint there. Something to think and talk about.

Computers

The computers are starting to show their age. It is really hard to scroll around - on some of them I could hardly do it at all. There are several of them that are not working but we didn't talk about that until the day before I left so Ismael wasn't sure which ones they were so that I could bring them back for repair.

I think of how the kids in the U.S. have such great technology at their fingertips. But again, it's far better than nothing - we're getting there but new technology (laptops or notebooks would be awesome).

I remember that it wasn't too long ago that we were even debating about desk-tops vs. lap tops!! Can you believe it!

Reading

Some of them are reading books on Raz Kids at levels that they really are not ready for. Apparently, in the Raz Kids, they can go on to the next level even if they haven't mastered all of the lower level books. Some of them seem more concerned with just "finishing" rather than reading and understanding. Honestly, some of the books are kind of boring but others are great. Sometimes they keep guessing at the answers to the questions and ultimately get them right. Some of them race through the questions, not really understanding the book nor what the question is really asking - like "What is the point of this book?"

Of course, it has obviously been a tremendous boost in getting them to read at all. We remember that none of them have books in their homes nor their schools - so it's been a huge success - I just think we need to possibly look for other programs to add to it or maybe find a way to get around some of the things they are doing. Obviously, having a better teacher would be an idea answer but finding one is another question.

For some of them, reading has clearly become something they love! While we had a meeting with the parents, several of them took the opportunity to invade the library and read! Honestly, I couldn't believe it. There were at least 7 of them sprawled out on the floor reading books of their choice with great concentration and it was all their own initiative. When we started, this would have never happened.

We need to expand the library for higher level books (6th grade and beyond).

Math

In math also, there has clearly been great progress but also I can see that there are issues that could easily be resolved if we had a better teacher. Seiner really just lets them do their own thing and it doesn't seem that they go to him with any questions.

Also, Orfe mentioned (and I agree) that for some of the younger kids, the Moby Max seems almost too challenging. They would be better off using the programs that are already on the computer – just harder for us to follow that.

I'm not sure how some of them are progressing in the Khan Academy without mastering the earlier levels. I thought it wouldn't let you do that. Although some of them have mastered over 200 skills, none of them has any concept of negative numbers (including Seiner). Roxanne and Lisa and I can try to tackle this at our next meeting.

Meeting with mothers of the students

Considering that there was only one day's notice, I was impressed with how many mothers came.

I talked to them about the great achievements of their students and how overall, the program has been a greater success than we would have ever imagined. They were all in full agreement that this was the case and they clearly see the value in it. There were really no negative comments.

The one big issue is attendance for some of the students. Some of them have only been coming once or twice or week or sometimes not at all. This includes some of the students who have sponsors.

It is obvious that the students who come regularly are achieving far more than the others. So we basically told them that if the students couldn't come at least 3 times a week, then they couldn't continue. No one seemed to have an issue with it.

I also talked to them about the "free auga pura". Some of them are getting their children to fill up a large container and they bring them home on a tuk tuk. They all seemed interested and we talked about possible ways to get the water home to them. I think it's important to Ismael – he's just really been tied up with the construction this year.

Then Ismael gave one of his "speeches" (which was of course pretty stern) and afterward, there was a spontaneous applause from everyone. So again, I think things are overall moving in a really forward direction.

Clinic construction

You've all seen the pictures. It's pretty incredible! It has turned out far better than I ever imagined.

A huge effort was obviously put into the cistern and septic system. I really think that Ismael has been practically living there all year.

Can't say enough good about Camillo also.

Everything is painted – some of the rooms need another coat.

Maybe we could think about putting quilts on some of the walls? Maybe find people who would “adopt” a room and we could have a plaque next to the quilt in their name?

Things that still need to be done:

1. Plumbing
2. Connect the electric
3. Put in cabinets and sinks
4. Put in driveway
5. Landscaping

We talked a long time about and although initially I was hoping that we could have the ribbon cutting in November, I'm not sure that it's realistic. It would probably be nicer to have everyone see everything when everything is arranged and it looks a little more put together. I think that if we work on getting everything in there in November, it might be better.

We need to talk about the sinks and cabinets. It would be great if could find a good carpenter (or 2 or 3!) to go for a couple of weeks and work on this. Prayers please!

Agriculture projects and Hanssel

Ismael feels pretty strongly that Hanssel should stop working for us – at least for now. He really doesn't think that Hanssel has been putting in much effort – thinks that his reports exaggerate what he actually does. Also it is straining their relationship. He thinks that Hanssel has no concept of what a “real” job would entail...things like your boss having real expectations, working regular hours, having to get your own transportation, etc.

They are also clearly not happy at all about the girlfriend. They say she is really young and is a big distraction for him – they think he's working much less diligently since she came along. My, doesn't this sound like the lament of many parents!

I imagine that the struggles they are having are no different than what most families would face in this situation.

I think he had hoped that Hanssel would have been more accountable to Randy but in reality, that has been hard when everything we see is just based on his reports.

He would like me to talk with Hanssel about it before he comes back.

Ismael thinks that once the clinic is done, he'll have time to direct the agriculture projects himself. Also, his goal is to have things set up so he can teach the people before setting up an initiative at their homes. Only 2 of the 4 chicken farms worked this year and only one of the 4 fish farms. I don't think he feels it has been as successful as it could have been – partly the people but I think partly Hanssel too.

Church services at their house

They have now extended their church services to Sunday and Thursday evenings. Ismael's brother gives the sermon and there is bible reading and singing – also a program for children. Many of the children in the program attend and Ismael would like to make it mandatory.

Finances

Ismael and I had a long talk about this – although these are things I have thought about, he is the one who brought it up. He really feels that we don't have sufficient mechanisms in place to avoid him ever being accused of being corrupt. He sends extensive reports to

Gloria and in actuality, he agrees that we probably have a better system than most, but in reality, he could be telling us that he is paying the workers and actually taking part of the money. Or, for all we know, he could be taking some of the materials we used for the clinic to use for his own house.

For example, he said that he and Orfe wanted to put a concrete floor under the “Ranchero” at their house. But they decided to put it on hold so that no one (he is concerned about neighbors or family) could accuse them of stealing the concrete from the project.

He wants to hire someone to do the kinds of things that Gloria does for us – he thinks it needs to be full time. After some discussion, we thought that maybe we could ultimately someone to be a receptionist at the clinic who could also do these kinds of things. That person would co-sign all checks above a certain amount.

In terms of income, I felt pretty convinced this week that there is no reason we can't start charging for things. The hospitals and municipality are referring people to us all the time for biopsies, cryos, etc. I had at least 3 people this week who had paps and biopsies that they paid a lot for (pap Q150 and biopsy Q500) and they came to me for a “second opinion” knowing that our results are more reliable.

Also, people pay a fortune for medication that is not only useless but dangerous . One woman was taking IM ceftriaxone for 3 days (Q390) for an uncomplicated UTI. As we know, they regularly pay large amounts for vitamins and IV vitamins.

Not sure what the exact right answer is but something to think about as we move into the new clinic. If we're going to keep it open all the time, expenses will be high.

ag

Hostal

We need to decide if we really want to move forward with the construction of the hostal.

Aside from the fact that it would be great to have a place to stay on site, we also don't have space for a kitchen in the clinic so that's a bit of an issue.

Obviously though, we don't have the money to start which would mean getting a loan which I'm not too excited about. We can talk about it at the next meeting.

Mayra

Mayra came up from Guatemala City to work with me on Saturday. I gave her the letters that we prepared that she can bring with her when she goes to the Embassy for her visa on Oct 27th. For some reason, her graduation was pushed back to mid-December. Although she has learned a lot, she is the first to say that the program is terrible. The fact that she worked with Chetti in the past and that Chetti taught her how to prepare the slides and what a good slide looks like, helped her realize how terrible the teaching is. She said they don't use the proper alcohol (they use 95% instead of 100%) so the color is terrible and it's almost impossible to see much. Also, there are never endocervical cells showing that they collection is abysmal.

Other issue is that I'm realizing that the pathologists in Guatemala City are no better than the cytotechs. Ah.....this is an uphill battle we are waging! To think it will be self-sustaining is a long way off. I can see why people are so happy about VIAA – what an easy cop-out to avoid putting in a real medical system.

4 K Race for Jesus! (put on by the Nazarene Church)

Highlights –

Was supposed to start at 4PM – started at 4:45. Endless talks about thanking the sponsors over and over and over – both before and after the race! Race was for the Nazarene Church.

Lots of sermons and prayers before the race and AFTER the race, the sermon really got going in the Maya Mall! Everyone had to listen to the 30 minute sermon before any of the awards were given out. No awards until about 7PM!!

Truly, the event ended up being one of my favorite times in Guatemala. Orfe had told the children about it 2 weeks before the race and organized a "running team". They ran together 2 or 3 times. There were 2 other girls in the group who decided not to come to the race because they only flip flops to run in. Most didn't have anything remotely like tennis shoes and even the "running shoes" were more like the cheap walking shoes you might but in Walmart.

A couple of days before the event, I invited the group to run with me in the morning. At 5AM, the "captain", Jose (age 16) showed up and had no trouble running 6 miles with me. Then around 5:30, one of the little 10 years, Carlos, joined us.

So off we went and it was hot and humid! I ran about an 8 minute pace and when I got to mile 1.5, I saw Maria (age 16). She didn't let me pass her until almost the end! I honestly couldn't believe it. She is a bit overweight and had only run 2 other times in her life! Then we came up on a couple of the boys and when they saw us, picked it up too! So in the end, Jose WON for all the boys under age 20 (I would guess there were at least 50) and Maria won for the girls under 20 (probably 30 or so)!!! Then 2 other boys got trophies - one was for second place and the other was because he got registered under Ismael's name and it was a Masters award (They actually called out Ismael's name but said that he was accepting it for Ismael) and so he won the Master's Division! Pretty hilarious but no one realized it except me and I wasn't about to say anything! Kind of cute how is trophy said "Masters". By the way, masters in Guatemala is 30 years old and above - Can you believe it??? I guess that's a reflection of the age of people who run and maybe that people don't live as long!

Before the trophies were given out, all the participants lined up and were given a medal (a really nice one!). You would have thought they all just won the Olympics. They were SOOOOOOO excited! Then when me and 4 of them ended up getting trophies, it was unbelievable! One of the organizers came up to me and wanted to know where this "team" was from!! Needless to say, they were all talking about how they were going to continue and how they could start meeting at 5:30 every morning. Jose was already the "Capitan" and we made Maria the "Visa-Capitan" for the girls!!

Other thing that cracked me up was that long after the race, when I had my trophy, this random woman (around age 30) comes up and asks if she can hold my trophy. Then she has her friend take lots of pictures of her (looking very serious) with the trophy!! Then she and her friend take pictures together holding the trophy! What a riot!

After the race, we went to Sarita in the mall. Their eyes were so big! None of them had been in there before and they hadn't seen an escalator before! One asked Ismael if they could only spend 1Q each and Ismael told them to get whatever they wanted. So they got these double waffle cones with chocolate on top or these huge sundaes. Orfe said that most of them had never even had ice cream before. It almost made me cry!

We left and got in the van and had lots of laughter and huge rounds of applause for everyone. Really had to be one of the highlights of my life!