

Cecilia Trip Report, May 2025
Saturday, May 10

I was thrilled to finally meet Adi at the Dallas airport! She was going on two hours of sleep - her sister got married the previous night! We had an uneventful flight and met Anne, Roxanne and Hailey in Guatemala City. I knew right away that it was going to be a fun week!

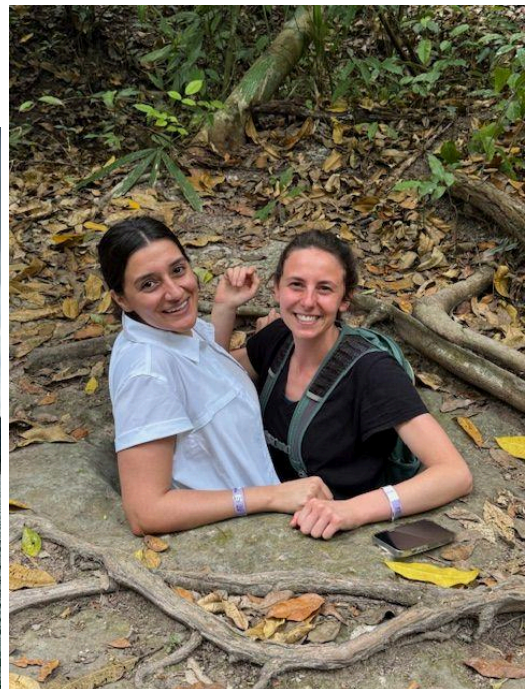
Kenneeth picked us up, and there was the most incredible surprise waiting for us at SewHope. Mayra and Seiner had set up a beautiful meal, table and backdrop in celebration of Mother's Day. The entire Guatemala staff was there, and everyone was wearing their best clothes. Seiner made gorgeous flower bouquets for each mother, and he called us each up by name to be recognized. It was so touching.



Sunday, May 11

I had the treat of going to Tikal for the first time! Mayra's husband is an incredible guide and so knowledgeable. It was really fun to spend time with Adi and Hailey and get to know them. They have incredible energy and were so excited for the week. We had a wonderful lunch at a restaurant right on the lake, and even saw one of our teachers there.

Kind of a funny story - there was a large family of about 15 people right next to us. 3 generations, and everyone was dressed very nicely for Mother's Day lunch. After the meal, a server walked up with a huge bouquet of roses, probably two dozen, and inside the bouquet were at least two dozen 100Q bills wrapped like roses. The server gave them to the little grandmother who was dressed in traditional clothes, and the sons were recording the entire thing on their phones. She stood there holding the bouquet for photos for several minutes. There is a local woman who makes these bouquets, and evidently she is quite the hit on YouTube. Seiner knew who she was, as she had surprised one of our students with a bike. Coincidentally, Mayra also received money in a flower bouquet from her family later in the week, as a birthday gift. I thought it was an interesting tradition!





Monday, May 12

Wonderful start to the week! Hugs and “good morning” were abound during drop off! After the daily 15 minute flag ceremony, Roxanne and I completed setting up the chalk activity for the students. They had a great time coloring and taking the tape off. I spent the morning helping with the chalk, watching the children water their sunflowers, feed the chickens and decorate flags for the celebration. Students were working out of their workbooks, the 5th graders were learning about proper email etiquette and how the internet works. The new teacher started, and Roxanne will discuss that more.

In the afternoon we visited families, one of my favorite things to do! We visited two families of students, and we then drove to Santa Ana Viejo, a community about 15 minutes away. We installed several stoves there when I was there last May, and I was eager to follow up! We visited the home of a woman who hosts the chicken coop at her house! She has the most space, so the coop was built at her place.

They have 200 chickens, and the 5 women alternate weeks to come and care for the chickens. One woman left the group late last year, as she has her own coop with 50 chickens! She used money she had earned to build a second coop. She was very proud to show us her two coops, as she should be! I recognized one of the girls from a visit with Gloria and Kim two years ago, and the family loved the old photos that I showed them. We agreed that the daughter had grown up a lot in two years!

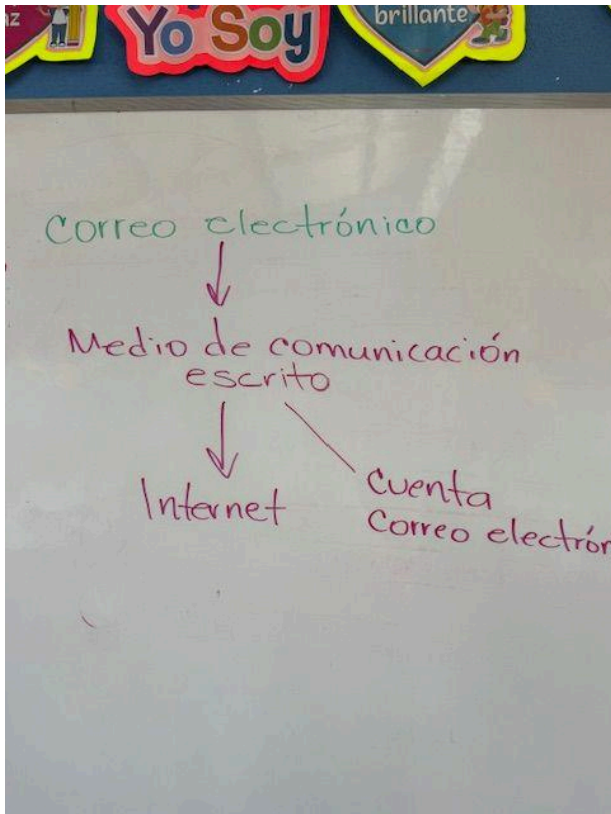
*It costs 55Q for one chick, and once fully grown, each can be sold for 150Q!

We then visited the home of a family I have met with on my past two trips. The grandmother was making empanadas on her Chispa stove when we arrived. She was very happy to see us, and said how

much she loves the stove! Her daughter lives in an adjoining house. The daughter has 15 children. Her daughter, Roxanna, who I first met two years ago, was very happy to see me, which was incredible!

They brought out chairs for us to sit on, and offered us warm tortillas and cold cheese. It tasted incredible and was such a welcoming gesture. Roxanna takes care of her siblings, including a brother who is severely disabled, and said she prefers that to cooking :) There was a little baby, about 1 years old, who was standing in a cooler filled with water. I guess that is one way to be sure he doesn't get into mischief! I showed her and her little sisters photos from previous visits. The mother has a tortilla business, and she was making tortillas along with two older daughters. I asked if she ever used her mother's Chispa stove, and she said she will sneak over there after her mother is done cooking and the stove is still hot. I asked Kenneeth after if he thinks a new stove would be beneficial for them, and he said yes. I am going to ask Kenneeth and Carmen if we can add them to the list for a new stove.





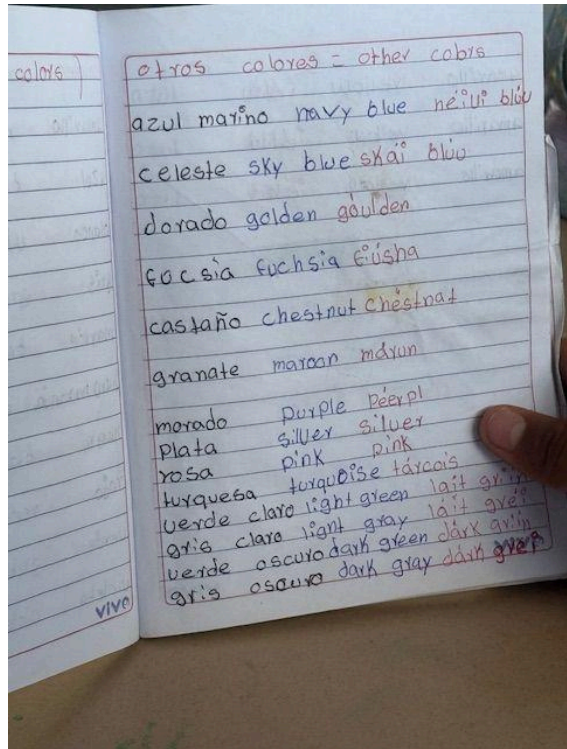


Tuesday, May 13

I spent the morning at the school. Leslin was working with 4th graders on fractions and decimals. She was writing the examples from the workbook on the board, and working through the problems. She would ask the students questions, and the whole process seemed very similar to how lessons are taught in the states. The students were so eager to learn and respectful. Everyone was paying attention and seemed engaged. I found the same to be true in Manuel's class. They were also working on decimals, and place value. He did one example problem, then wrote additional problems on the board.

He would call students up to work through the problems. They also have a notebook that has pages and pages of English. He writes the word or phrase in Spanish and English on the board, the students write them down, then they recite them. They counted to 100 in English, 1000 by hundreds and said the alphabet! He wrote down phrases such as stepdaughter, daughter in law, etc in Spanish and English. He said them in Spanish, I said them in English, and the class then said them in English. The students really loved the exercises and it was fun hearing them pronounce the words in English. I certainly would not say that Manuel knows English, but it is great that he is teaching them basic words and phrases!

The teachers worked on projects for the celebration after school, and Roxanne and I went with Seiner to drop off a trunk full of herbs to a local mother's house. She was going to make the rub for the meat for the celebration! Bags and bags of fresh herbs! Roxanne worked on her bubble project. We all know this, but her love and dedication to the school and students is endless! She was running around the whole time doing projects, helping students, and coming up with new ideas!





Wednesday, May 14

We had the pleasure of watching rehearsals for the celebration this morning. The students all watched the other classes perform their dances and songs, and it was such a treat! They were all incredible and truly moved me to tears. Adi, Roxanne and I left with Kenneeth and Seiner for a tour of the pineapple farm. We drove for about an hour through the farm with a young administrator with a very, very sharp machete! The farm is 1500 acres, and they produce pineapples that get sent all over the world. They use netting to protect the almost full grown pineapple from the sun, and they require very little water! They have ditches next to each row to drain the water, so that the plants don't get overwatered. The pineapple was delicious! We also toured the packing facility. The pineapples are packed in Dole boxes, and some of them are sold at Costco! The production line came to a stop during our tour.

We worked on symmetry lessons with the students in the afternoon, which they really enjoyed! We also had a meeting with the Ministry of Education. Roxanne will elaborate more on that, but it sounds like due to the lack of incentive for their teachers to do continuing education, the majority of them don't, and the Ministry can't make them. There are some who did very well on Khan, and Roxanne will be reaching out to that small group to see if they would be interested in continuing.

I had fun taking photos with some of the girls after school. I showed them how to set a timer for photos on my phone, and they loved it. They reminded me so much of my youngest - having fun and being goofy with friends.

I also met with Carmen and 3 members of the mother's group. Only one of the women, Marcelo's wife, is able to read and write. I was blown away by the success they are having! In April alone, they saved \$853, and so far this year, they have saved \$2244. They have a great system:

- They have a President, Secretary and Treasurer. The President and Treasurer can't read or write, but they can count.
 - They agree that saving at home is hard, but doing it as a group is much easier.
- One woman built walls and a structure for her home, and is planning to complete the roof when she cashes out in December. She is a single mother of 3 boys, and I visited her home under construction last May. She is at SewHope often helping and cooking.
- One woman plans to build a kitchen later this year. She used her money from 2024 to buy her husband a used motorbike.
 - They meet weekly so that they don't spend any money.
 - Carmen works with them to visualize a goal and work towards it.
- When they began, the minimum each person had to contribute was 25Q, now it is 200Q
- Making food during our visits is what brings in the most money, due to the number of people at the clinic.
- We made laundry soap! One mother had made it, and the others wanted to learn how.
 - Ingredients cost 50Q and it makes 3 containers. Each one is sold for 50Q, for a profit of 100Q. At stores, each container of soap costs 70Q.

That evening Mayra took us to Santa Ana for ice cream, which was a welcomed treat!

On the way back to SewHope after ice cream we learned that a mother of two of our students had been shot 12 times in her shop earlier that day. Mayra mentioned it very calmly, and we went to Seiner immediately when we got back. He told us that one of her daughters, a 4th grader at SewHope, was with her at the shop when it happened. She also has a kindergartener, and an older daughter who Seiner tutors. The news was reporting that she was dead, but Seiner spoke with the family, and she was still alive, and was in surgery at San Benito hospital.

*On Thursday, 5/22, Mayra told me that the mother had been transferred to Guatemala City earlier in the week for surgery to have the bullets removed. The children are there as well, and have not returned to school since the shooting. I told Mayra the mother will probably be scared to return to Santa Ana, and she agreed. They told us it was probably something to do with the cartels. The woman's husband is in the US.





Thursday, May 15

Another whirlwind day! We observed students in the morning, and had our Zoom about the Roach Family grant. Students were painting the walls outside the school, rehearsing their songs for Friday, and the Ministry of Health was there administering vaccines to those who were due. It was all quite dramatic, with some students crying and screaming on the porch of the school. Of course Seiner was there to comfort them all and hold their hands. He is incredible, and the students just adore him! The tents were being set up and chairs were being delivered.

Adi and I headed out with Kenneeth after the grant call. We first completed installing a stove for a grandmother of one of our students. She recently expanded her kitchen and repaired the roof so that she could receive the new stove.

We then went to a town I had never been to called Purusila. Anne told me that Sister Pam used to work with families in this area. Kenneeth connected with the local pastor, and he did a presentation to families a few months ago. The pastor then selected the 20 families with the greatest needs. The first home received the first bed we have delivered, and they were so grateful! A family of 4 lives there, in one very small room. Their stove was very low to the ground, and you could see severe damage to the roof. They will be getting a new stove once repairs are done to the roof. The mother and daughters loved the new bed! She said water had done a lot of damage to the mattresses that they currently use - their roof had holes and gaps all around it. It was very, very sweet seeing the daughters lay on the bed together. It is incredible to think that a donated mattress from Fostoria had found its way into this home.

It really did give me the chills thinking about it. I wished that everyone who donated to Giving Tuesday or bought a bed frame or supported us in any way could be there to experience seeing this joy.

One our drive to the next home, we passed an extremely large home that was under construction. It stood out in so many ways. It was huge, the doors and windows were beautiful and large and brand new and there was a large cement wall all around it. Kenneeth said someone from the US was building it. I had many more questions, but really just couldn't believe that such a large home was being built in such an otherwise very poor area.

The next visit was a very sad one. As we were pulling up I could see just how little this family had. The home was very, very small. There was a grandmother, a daughter and her son who lived there. The daughter has a tube in her throat that she needs in order to be able to breathe. She worked over an open fire making tortillas for years, causing extreme damage to her throat and nasal passages. She said she cannot breathe out of her nose at all. She needs the tube replaced, but that will cost \$1300 USD, which they do not have. The grandmother was telling me that the 8 year old grandson was very sick. He has hepatitis and a UTI. He was not able to keep any liquids down and he looked very pale. She was hoping to take him to a doctor the next day. We bring them food once a month, and after some repairs are done to the kitchen roof, they will be getting a new stove. I tried to find a silver lining in this visit, but really it was very, very sad. We said a prayer together before we left, and Kenneeth seems very committed to helping the families in this town.

Thursday afternoon and evening was a lot of event setup! I helped the teachers hang fabric on the backdrop, I helped Roxanne and Adi hang the flags the students made, and I watched Mayra and the guards prepare a large fire to cook the 1500 lb cow that had been donated and prepared in the outdoor kitchen earlier in the day. The place was buzzing, and it was awesome. There was so much energy, even after the sunset. I could hear them in the kitchen as I was going to sleep, and I know that Anne gave them a speaker that Randy purchased. Everyone was in a great mood and it got me so excited for Friday!









Friday, May 16

Sadly, Adi left this morning and missed the celebration. She purchased a basic economy ticket which couldn't be changed! I think it is worth paying a bit extra to be able to change your ticket. I think this

year has shown us that you never know what can come up! Adi is incredible. Her translation abilities are the best I have seen, she has a deep connection to our mission, and truly loves being a part of SewHope. We are very, very lucky to have her.

Celebration Day. Words can't adequately describe how incredible it was, and the amount of effort that went into this event. Poor Seiner was in tears with anxiety that morning, and luckily Anne and Roxanne were on hand to keep him calm and pray with him. He puts his heart and soul into everything he does, and he loves SewHope so much.

We celebrated Day of the Family and the 3rd anniversary of the school. The flag procession was beautiful and the emcee announced all the staff by name which I thought was very kind. The turnout was great - every chair was taken. I believe we had over 500 people throughout the day. Anne gave a wonderful talk about the history of SewHope. The head folks from the Ministry of Education were there, as well as the slick looking mayor of Santa Ana and a local pastor. The students all did an incredible job with their performances, and parents were so proud. They could come to the front and record the entire performance, and take photos with the students afterwards. It was just like the US! The staff did incredible. They were cooking food, keeping the students behaved and talking with parents. It was a very long morning and everyone was ready for lunch. The team boxed 500 meals and distributed them, along with a cold drink. This easily took an hour, and I was AMAZED at how everyone waited patiently for their food to come to them.

They did drawings for each class, and one family per class won a basket that was filled with food and a 2 liter of Coke. Some families also won a new pillow. It was a wonderful day! I had fun helping to deliver the meals, take photos and watch all the performances. I finally hit my wall about 4pm. I have never been so hot in my life and I was pretty lightheaded. I took a cold shower and laid down for a bit to go through photos, and that helped. We went out for a very fancy dinner to celebrate Mayra's birthday. It was great to spend time with her family!







Saturday, May 17

I had my bags packed and Kenneth took me to the airport at 5:30 am. I was very sad to leave - it was a great week! Each trip I feel that I get to know the staff better.

I really like Kenneth, and he seems very connected to our work, and motivated to help. I spent virtually no time with the medical team, as they were very busy doing procedures, but their system seemed to be running smoothly. The woman who cleans for us (I feel awful I can't remember her name), was always smiling. She came on Friday wearing a very pretty dress for the celebration, and returned later in her SewHope shirt with her name embroidered on it, and wearing heels! I could tell she is so proud to be a part of our team!!! The guards are always smiling and willing to help with anything at all. Everyone is so committed, and even Seidy, who left the school because of her pension, was at our anniversary celebration with her daughter.

My favorite time of day is the morning. I would be up by 5 am, start the coffee, take a walk around the property and watch the sunrise. It is so peaceful there. And guess what - almost every morning there was a patient there at 5 am! It was a fantastic week!!!!

