

Cecilia Trip Report May 20-25, 2024

Monday, May 20

I arrived in Flores at 5 pm, and was greeted by Marcelo and Carmen. They had been out getting a new piece for the roof of outside bathrooms, and picked me up in the red truck. There was some confusion as to who was going to pick me up, and Carmen was very apologetic. I told her I didn't know about the confusion, and was just glad someone was there to get me!

I arrived at SewHope to find Sammy and Roxanne working on the cards for sponsors. Patients were still there, at 5:45! Anne had a really busy day and there had been some issues with patients waiting for unnecessarily long periods of time. Rekha had been helping with check-in, and had been taking blood sugars and blood pressures. She told me she thought there was some drama with Mayra and Carmen regarding picking me up. I said things are always a bit stressful when we arrive at different times.

I got settled into the bunk room with Roxanne and Chetti. It was extremely hot, even after the sun went down. I also really noticed the smell of smoke. There were wildfires burning throughout the area, and when the winds picked up in the evenings, I thought the smoke smell got even worse. We only had two floor fans, in addition to our smaller personal fans, and we were all very hot!



Tuesday, May 21

The day started hot and hazy, and I woke up right around 5:45. Luckily I remembered to get the coffee ready the night before, and Roxanne got it started for us every morning, even though she doesn't drink coffee!

Students were lining up beginning at 6:30. They wait outside of the gate for Seiner to let them in, which he does beginning at 6:55. Roxanne and I were there to welcome the students also. One of the best parts of each day - welcome hugs from the students! Each one hugs Seiner, then would hug Roxanne and then come to me. Many of them said "good morning", which was very sweet. I am guessing the teachers taught them that before our arrival. I was SHOCKED to see that they were all in their "phys ed" uniforms, which consisted of a bright yellow and black $\frac{3}{4}$ zip sweatshirt from the Glass City Marathon, with a big Toledo Roadrunners logo on the back. Many of them fit the students perfectly, even the smaller children. I sent Randy a photo right away, and none of us knew when we sent them! I was very confused. The school day started with student-led prayers. (Tim Carney says the shirts were donated in 2021, and he reached out to Glass City Marathon race director to see if they have any other shirts to donate)

We held the first day of the metric olympics today, and it was so much fun! The older students went first. Sammy was in charge of the discuss station, I did the shot put, Seiner did javelin, and Roxanne did the weighing. Roxanne will provide more insight into some math issues that we noticed. Overall, from my limited math interaction with the students during the morning, math skills vary greatly. Some of the students acted like they had no idea how to measure with a ruler, and there were others who knew how to use it right away. Overall addition seemed good with the older grades. As the older students finished they partnered up with a younger student to help them go through the stations. The younger students also seemed to struggle with the measuring and adding. But it was obvious that everyone loved being outside, and they all had a great time throwing the koosh ball and seeing how far they could throw compared to their friends.

I got very sunburnt! I have never spent so much time outside during previous trips, and hadn't put sunscreen on my neck and shoulders - big mistake! Luckily we grow aloe on the grounds and Mayra got some that evening.

One great story from the morning: There was a boy in 3rd grade who was particularly taken with Sammy. Evidently they hit it off on Monday, and on Tuesday the boy brought money with him to school, and wanted to buy Sammy food from the mother's group. Sammy did not want to let the boy pay, but I told Sammy it would be very rude to refuse. So we all walked over to the NEW outdoor kitchen, he purchased Sammy a sandwich, and handed it to him. Then they walked back to the school together with their sandwiches. It was a wonderful moment!!!

Hard to believe, but all of this happened before 11:00 AM!!!! Because of the heat the students left at 10:30.

Rekha, Sammy, Carmen, Roxanne, Vicky, Marcelo, Guillermo and I headed out at 11:30 to a local home to install a stove. I had never met Guillermo before. He helped out during the day, and was a great right hand man for Marcelo. So, so nice. He has 3 children who attend the school.

In the home we visited lived a grandmother, grandfather, and disabled granddaughter. The girl's mother had died recently. The grandmother was 65 and had 12 children, and 6 were still living. Her husband was 74. The home was one of the worst that I have seen. It literally had NO ventilation. The stove was "on" when we arrived, and through some small holes in the ceiling, I could see just how much smoke was in the home. I could barely breathe in there, and found that I was getting dizzy if I was in there for more than a few minutes at a time. I am sure the high heat (105) contributed to that. The "old" house, which was about 3 feet away from the "new" house, had walls that were made from plastic coke bottles. Their son and daughter-in-law also lived right next door, although we did not interact with them much.

Carmen has detailed info forms on all families we install stoves for. We know the people who live in the home, what they eat and how often they eat, any special needs they have, health issues, etc. Really an incredible amount of information and insight! I wonder if she puts this into a spreadsheet or if they are all just paper forms?

Carmen is wonderful! All the families were so happy to see her, and it is obvious to me that she feels deeply about what we are doing. She really listens to whoever she is talking to, and I think she has a way of making people feel valued. She told the grandmother when we left that we would come get her for a pap. She misunderstood and tried to get in the van with us right then. Carmen promised to come back the next day. We stopped by unannounced a few hours later to drop off a water filter, and they were already cooking on the new stove :)

The grandfather was using a saw to cut wood to prop the stove up on. Carmen was holding the wood steady and I was seriously afraid she was going to get a finger cut off. The saw was very, very dull and was vibrating all over the place. I also noticed that Marcelo's tools for cutting holes in the ceilings for the chimney installation do not seem adequate. I am wondering if there are better tools that we can purchase here and send on the container? The drill they use is DeWalt

We then visited the home of 3 students. A few of the homes were multi-family homes. We visited a couple who own a tailoring business. They sew clothes and fix a lot of SewHope uniforms. They also do sewing machine repair. All the students were so excited when we pulled up. Two girls ran to change into their best dresses and a set of 3 brothers couldn't wait to show Sammy around their home. All of the families of course said great things about the school. Many grew some sort of vegetables in small gardens on the sides of the homes.

The youngest brother, I believe he is 5, but is very small, had a terrible sounding cough. I heard him coughing all week. I am hopeful that if the teachers notice something like that that they will make a note of it and maybe have Bianey listen to his chest or speak to Mayra about it?

We stopped to pick up ice cream from the gas station, and when we arrived back, after 5:00, and the bus of Mayan women was just getting ready to leave. Anne had another jam packed day, seeing patients from 7am until well after 5pm.

Chetti brought a 3rd floor fan over from the lab, so we each had a large fan to use that night. I slept much better! Perhaps the jam packed day had something to do with it!





Wednesday, May 22

The morning started with an almost hour-long National Tree Day celebration. There were prayers, songs, flags and an activity where different parts of a tree were explained. Students read from the script, led the prayers, carried the flags, and took part in the tree activity. It was a really nice celebration, and I was pleasantly surprised how well the kids did, especially the little ones who had to stand there for an hour!

We completed the Metric Olympics with the younger children and took a large group photo, which in itself was no small feat! That and the tree ceremony filled the morning until 10:30.

I sat in the outdoor kitchen in the afternoon, which I have found has the best breeze on the entire property. Guillermo was walking by and had his new SewHope shirt, a devotional book from Roxanne and I think a towel from Rekha. He stopped to say thank you for all of the items.

I helped the reinforcement students water the newly planted trees. The girls would fill the water bottles and walk over to each tree to water them. At one point the water shut off and they had to stop, but it was obvious how much they enjoyed doing it!

Carmen and I went to pick up the grandmother and granddaughter from the day before and bring them back to see Anne. The grandmother said she didn't think we were going to come back for them, ha! Carmen said that the granddaughter had had sexual relations before. Evidently she lived with the mother's boyfriend before the mother died. Anne was not able to examine her without traumatizing her.

Carmen drove the red truck to get them, and came to find me to ask if I wanted to go with her. She seemed like a nervous driver, and I found out later that she does not have her license to drive the truck. I thought she did fine, and can see how important it is for her to be able to drive to homes, at least the ones that are close by.





Thursday, May 23

Well, I started the day by finding a dead frog stuck in the toilet bowl. The security guard came running with a stick, not knowing if I was freaking out over a snake or other animal, and Chetti ended up peeling him off the bowl. It was disgusting.

After that excitement, I started the day with morning hugs from the students before leaving with Anne, Chetti, Rekha, Mayra, Bianey and Sandra for a jornada. I learned how to stain slides that morning, and had a great time helping Mayra and Chetti. I can't believe I didn't learn how to do it on past trips. I can see how when there are dozens and dozens of patients it can be very time consuming to have to stain the slides, and read them. I loved being able to contribute in that way! We saw about 36 patients.

Rekha did breast exams, and taught women how to do self-exams. She said that she could get some instructional cards that we could send on the container. We stopped in Santa Ana to get ice cream on the way home!

Mayra said if possible to send many, many brushes on the container.

We had a meeting with Camilo that afternoon. He is working on a few different quotes, and said we can expect them later this week, or early next. There was a lot of discussion over where a new building would go, do we need a fancy roof like we currently have (we don't), size of classrooms, etc. We also discussed adding on to the current outdoor kitchen located by the fish ponds. Seiner wants to have a covered, larger space for meetings. I personally think that is something that our team and fathers of students could make, and is not something that requires Camilo's professional staff??? But I of course have never built something like that so what do I know!

Anne and I had a meeting with Mayra that night. Our decision to give Carmen a new title, especially so close to our trip, has caused some issues. Mayra doesn't appear to be helping Carmen transition into this role. Mayra said that other employees don't like Carmen. I hope we got the point across that Mayra needs to help Carmen, and not feel threatened by her. My worry is that Carmen feels isolated and unsupported by her colleagues and will leave. Rekha, as well as Anne, mentioned some issues with Bianey. Anne can elaborate on the conversations and the issues with staff.

Anne locked herself out of her room that night! She thought she would have to sleep in the bunk room, but the guard came and cut a hole in the screen, removed one of the glass pieces from the window, and used a long stick to get the keys off the bed.

We really need a master room key somewhere, if possible!!!



Friday, May 24

I took a walk with Roxanne and Rekha first thing in the morning, and it was already sweltering at 6:15 am. We passed some students on their way to school, and of course got hugs from them when we arrived back. This particular group of students got dropped off at school at 6:30 am.

7:30 am and the chairs for movie night were getting delivered!

We had a great meeting with the representatives from the education ministry. Anne cut to the chase right away, before Vicky or Seiner could steer us down an unnecessary path. ****She asked if in 2025 we could hold K-3 in the morning, and 4-6 in the afternoon, until we are able to build a new building. They said YES! Morning classes will run from 7-12, and afternoon classes from 1-6. They are going to recommend that the Ministry approves this plan for the 2025 school year.**** Of course there is still a lot to figure out, but great news!!!

Notes from what was said:

They said they think that our programs are very good, that we support children and that they cannot deny that we are doing much good for their communities. We are helping to provide jobs, and they thanked us for the gift we are giving them. They also said that homework is killing parents, as they cannot help the students and the students have so much of it. Some concern over the hours the teachers will work and being sure that the students are still getting a high quality education with a shorter school day than we currently have.

We installed stoves in three homes in the afternoon. They were all very impactful in different ways. Rekha and Sammy were really moved by the personal stories that we learned, and Carmen, Marcelo and Guillermo all did an excellent job. They are so patient, never rush anyone and work so well in difficult situations. Something I see as an almost impossible task - installing a stove in an incredibly small room with no ventilation, and installing a chimney on a roof made of thing tin, doesn't even phase the team. They are such hard workers!

The first home we had no place to park, so we parked the truck down the street and walked down the busy highway with the stove supplies. The parents had a disabled son who lived at home. They also had beautiful gardens and they were growing tomatoes, potatoes and onions. They showed us their appreciation by singing a beautiful song, and playing the guitar. This roof was particularly high, and Marcelo had to climb the 15 ft ladder to install the chimney.

3 of the houses we visited had disabled adults living there. I can't imagine what will happen to these adult children when their parents die. I hope one of their siblings will take care of the

The second home housed an extended family. There were 7 grandchildren, their parents and grandparents. The grandmother, who was 75, used ¼ of her monthly allowance to go and buy us cold bottles of Coke. One of the girls remembered me from when we went to the school she attended in November. We had fun looking at videos of her and her classmates dancing, and

the younger children wanted to watch the videos over and over. We took a group photo of the children, and continued to walk around their home, which was very, very small and cramped. While Rekha and I were standing with the younger ones outside the home, the oldest came to get us. They had brought her disabled brother out to sit on the bench, and asked that we take another photo that included him. It was hard to keep it together! They were all just so grateful. I promised to visit the family the next time I am in Guatemala.

We went back for lunch around 2:00, and the teachers were already popping popcorn and making juice for movie night! Roxanne was buzzing all around getting things set up.

We headed back out at 3:00 to install the last stove. The house was once again very, very small and cramped and had a terrible smell to it, I could barely go inside. Marcelo had to climb very far back on the hot roof to install the chimney. Guillermo handed him pieces of wood to lay down, and he crawled over them to get to the spot where the chimney had to go. I was amazed!

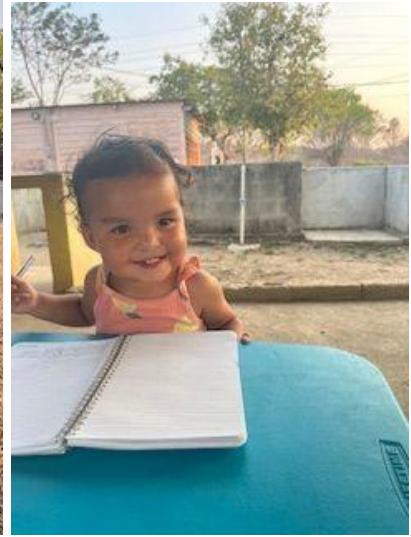
Movie night was a huge success! Families began to arrive at 6:00. Of course the power went out about 6:15, 15 minutes before we were set to begin! Marcelo and Diego wheeled the generator over, but we ended up not needing it. Families and students all sat in their chairs so patiently waiting for the movie to begin, which took forever! Seiner said a very long prayer, made announcements, and began dismissing families to get popcorn. First the mothers, then the fathers, then others, then the children in grades K, 1, etc. It took forever! We finally started the movie, and everyone loved it. At one point I swear all 250 people were silent! Anne and I helped bag popcorn and tie baggies filled with juice. We snuck a quick dinner in and Roxanne and I were back for the end of the movie. Lots of people wanted to take photos with Roxanne and I when it ended, which was very sweet. One family who looked better off mentioned to me that they have a family member who speaks English and would be interested in translating. They also said their 2nd grade son is learning English and loves school, and I told them that he should continue to use our online programs to get ahead.

Went back to the hostel around 9:00 to pack!









Pictures of staff and family are above.

Saturday, May 25

Left at 5:30 for the flights home. Rekha and Sammy really, really enjoyed their time at SewHope. I am hopeful that Sammy's fundraiser will be a big success. Rekha also mentioned wanting to contribute to a new school building - she feels very connected to the school.

Flights back were relatively uneventful, and I arrived home at midnight.