

Medical Mission Guatemala 2015

January 27-February 5, 2015

Our team of 20 missionaries from northern Ohio has returned from a wonderful, fulfilling trip to five communities (Panmuc, Chipozo, Pan Hux, Chiguorron, and Najtilabaj) in the interior of Guatemala. We ministered to those who needed dental care, pediatric care, a visit with a General Practitioner, or were in need of glasses or sunglasses. It was a hard trip physically, but full of love and compassion, and of course new friends. I triaged for our three dentists, Denver, Paulette, and Kathy T., and the 8-10 Guatemalan dental students who joined us three out of five of our working days.

January 27, 2015: My ride picked me up at 3:20 AM. Our team of 20 left CLE at 5:50 AM for Houston. We hurried to the Houston international terminal and left for Guatemala City(G.C.) at 9:12 AM, arriving in G.C. about noon. Guatemala is one hour behind us. We had no problem getting all the meds, dental supplies (including a collapsible dental chair!), toys, or any of our personal luggage through customs. They did not inspect one bag! Ezekiel, Williams, and Jorge, from FUNDENOR (Funcion para el Desarrollo del Norte), were there to meet us. FUNDENOR sponsors mission teams who in turn help their people. It was so nice to see familiar faces! By 12:45 we had loaded the Greyhound-type bus with all our gear and started a five hour ride north to Alta Verapaz. Our long trip wound through G.C. then up the mountain highways which were in some spots under major construction. We were very lucky that we were NOT held up at all. We heard that some travelers had to wait over an hour for the one way traffic to finally flow in their direction! As we climbed higher up the mountains we were actually in the clouds. Five hours later we arrived at Hotel Bella Verapaz. It was very chilly. Actually I should say it was cold! And damp! They do NOT have central heating. After a good dinner of stew and rice, tortillas and avocado and sweetened bananas (the dining room is OUTSIDE), we all asked for an extra blanket and went to bed. I was in room #15 with my roomie, Kathy T. Good thing I had silk long johns and an extra fleece throw with me. It was mountain cold!

January 28: We were up at 6 AM. It was so cold, but at least we had hot water for a shower. Breakfast was runny oatmeal with banana in it, scrambled eggs and bacon, black beans, goat cheese, and peach juice. We loaded the pickup truck with all the meds etc., and then all of us got in the minivan and started the 1 hour and 45 minute journey up the mountain to the village of Panmuc. The docs and farmacia (pharmacy) were set up in school rooms while the dentists were up the hill in a separate all-purpose building. The day was sunny (most of the time) but very cold.

I had on four layers of clothing plus a warm wrap over all. My triage table was outside. A dental student, Beberly, helped me with BP and pulse and translation from Pokomchi to Spanish. I recorded everything in Spanish and sent the patient in to a waiting dentist. Only extractions were done. The Maya's teeth are generally very bad due to a poor diet, lack of milk, the large amount of coffee they drink, and the absence of clean, purified water. Most of the population has worms and/or parasites. Beberly and I had triaged 50 patients by noon: a total of 98 for the first day! That means at least 98 teeth were pulled that day. The 'outhouse' was up another hill, the steps being slippery mud-covered rocks. You had to pour a bucket of water down the toilet after using the 'facility'. Ha! They told me "don't worry; those are just spiders in the water." They were! For lunch we had PBJs and fruit and water. Gustavo, the hotel host/owner/chef/jefe had made for each of us a 'souvenir' burlap bag/purse/carry-all with our name in leather on the front. We carried our lunch in it each day. It was overcast most of the day with a little sunshine around noon. Cold! At lunchtime we took a walk down the road to warm up, and talked and played with the children. They loved the colorful parachute we had. The team left Panmuc about 4:30 PM. It was another cold, damp evening and night. They told us not to sleep between the sheets but to put two blankets together and sleep between the blankets. That was much warmer. But not like home!

January 29: Today we are awake by 5:45. It was downright cold! I wore the same clothes hoping to stay as warm as the previous day. After devotions we had a breakfast of poached egg with a white sauce on it, toast, and 2 small pieces of rolled up ham. We packed the meds and left for Chipozo. FUNDENOR had everything organized in every village. The villagers were told we would be there; they signed up, received a ticket, and presented that ticket at the proper triage station. Some people (mostly moms with their children because the men were working in the fields) stood in 2-3 different triage lines throughout the day to get all the care they needed. There were long lines of women and children waiting for us when we arrived in each village. All are willing to walk long distances to get the medical attention. This day pediatrics was across the street in another building. I never saw them all day. After lunch-PBJ- we took a walk and played with the kids. It felt like we were taking a walk in the clouds. Later in the afternoon it started to rain and then turned to drizzle. By the end of the day we had triaged about 135 dental patients! Needless to say the Guatemalan dental students were working with us. Nulo, a twenty-something seminary student who volunteers as a translator for FUNDENOR, worked with me today. He was with me last year. What a great sense of humor! It

is always fun to have him helping me. Another volunteer, Elena, was my translator to Pokomchi. She also had a great sense of humor. After a long day we had a fun ride back to the hotel—all of us together making heat in the minivan for each other to get warm. After a nice hot shower, dinner was served OUTSIDE. Fish soup! UGH! I asked for something else. Gustavo gave me delicious tomato soup plus chicken and rice. He made an apple cake/pie type dessert. There was lots of good talk at evening devotions, rehashing the day's work and planning for the next day. We were all very cold by then so went to bed early to get warm.

January 30: It is Friday, our third work day. It is still so cold!! Breakfast was Gustavo's homemade yogurt with granola on top, a glass of watermelon-banana drink, and toast. Today we drove to Pan Hux. We arrived at this community way up in the mountains about 8:30 AM. Again all the docs and farmacia were set up in a school in different rooms with lots of moms and kids already in line waiting for us. Our three dentists were alone today, no dental students. The first three dental patients were little girls, 6, 6, and 7. Only one little girl did not cry. She was a real trooper having at least two teeth pulled. The other two made up for her. Everyone thought the docs were torturing the girls. The rest of the day was really quiet. We only had 11 patients by lunchtime. I learned, in Pokomchi, how to ask if they had eaten breakfast. The look was one of surprise when they realized I was speaking their language. I kept getting mixed up on YES and NO in Pokomchi. Their 'yes' sounds like 'ho' and their 'no' sounds like 'ta'. After a lunch of PBJ we crossed the street and climbed up some steep steps to a little tienda/store and bought TORTRIX—are like our Fritos. One Q (7.5 Quetzals equal \$1.00 American) bought a small bag. We bought them out. Back to work about 1:30. Our last patient was done by 3:15 so we walked down the road to a cute little picturesque church. The steps were straight up and slippery from the drizzle. On the way home, notice I said 'home', Bill H wanted to stop in San Cristobol at the boot shop. He, along with all those who got off to help/supervise/translate, ordered a pair of custom made boots and then they all walked the rest of the way to the hotel—in the rain. Back at Hotel Bella Verapaz, I took a hot shower, and pretended I was warm. Dinner was a tasty, tender pork chop, creamed green beans (cold), and small potatoes. After our evening devotions it started to rain, again. I went to bed with 5 blankets!

January 31: We were up at 6 AM to a very cold morning, again. After a breakfast of poached egg with salsa, black beans, goat cheese and a combination of pineapple and orange juice, we loaded up and drove to Chiguorron. Today the

dental clinic was on the second floor of the school. Nulo was with me again , and the dental students were back with the team. Gloria, a beautiful Maya girl, worked with us. We triaged almost 100 patients before lunch! PBJ and banana and water again for lunch. It was a little warmer in the afternoon; the sun actually came out for a while. Nulo and I took a selfie and sent it to Nicole, his girlfriend in Germany. Nicole worked with me last year when she was studying Spanish in Guatemala. She emailed back right away and asked if I needed any help. What fun! What a small world! I love it! After the docs had seen all the villagers we played with the kids. I played Frisbee a long time and did the hokey-pokey with the children. Some jumped rope, some chased bubbles with Brad leading the fun, women and girls had their hair braided while the boys played hoops with the docs. I had a special thing happen to me this afternoon. An old Maya woman came up to me on the basketball court and made the sign of the cross on me, and blessed me in Pokomchi. Wow! I cried when I realized what she had done. Four of us (Denver, me, Brad, and Ezekiel) had OSU hats on so we did an O-H-I-O right there in the courtyard. All the kids jumped in front of us doing the same hand motions. Hilarious! Then all the sudden we were playing in the clouds. It was really damp and chilling but it did not stop the fun we were having. The trip back down the mountain was long and treacherous until we were below the clouds. We took a detour through San Cristobol to drop off three translators. It was Saturday in the city with lots of people socializing in the town square, the local farmers market overflowing into the streets, and a wedding just getting out at the local church. Beautiful! We arrived back at the hotel by 6 PM, showered, and then had a wonderful dinner of lasagna. It was preceded with a bowl of cream of chicken soup and then a dessert of mole (a dish make with lots of cocoa beans and chilies). It was cold sitting outside for evening devotions but it was a good ending to another good day.

February 1: Sunday-our day of rest. It was actually a little warmer when we got up, but only a tad warmer. Breakfast was a tortilla lasagna/quiche thingy, banana juice, two little cocktail hot dogs, cold, and three watermelon balls. It looked nice but----the juice was good. Some of our team took a taxi into Coban to attend a Catholic mass. Seven of us sat in the sunshine and held our own worship service. II Corinthians 5:7 About 10:30 AM the whole team left for Coban, the largest nearby city, about $\frac{1}{2}$ hour from our hotel. Our visit to El Calvario, the most sacred site in Coban, was spectacular!

Construction began in 1810: there are 108 steps up to the church. We sat in the sanctuary for a short time listening to the most beautiful singing. Behind the church and down the hill was a soccer field. A local team was getting ready to play a team from Honduras. Ezekiel then led us to a really great restaurant for our noon meal. El Penascal was typical Guatemalan. Ezekiel treated us all to a bowl of the country's national soup-CACAO. It is a cold chocolate soup served in a shell that has been painted bright colors. It is delicious! I ordered tacos with pico de gallo and the most flavorful guacamole. Everyone said his/her meal was excellent. After a tour of the town square and the Sunday outdoor market, we found some tourist shops and did a little souvenir shopping. Always fun! Later, back at Hotel Bella Verapaz, we wrapped gifts for our translators. The forty blankets that had been donated by a hospital in the Cleveland area were stuffed with toothbrushes etc. and then tied with pretty ribbon. Sunday evening the representatives from FUNDENOR came to the hotel and talked with us about their current situation. The Guatemalan government, led by President Otto Perez Molina, does not support its own indigenous people. The government does not give them any aid. The only aid they allow is for groups like our mission team to enter the country to help the natives. Recently the gov't forced quite a number of medical clinics to close, laid off the doctors, and made it a lot harder for organizations like FUNDENOR to get a grant approved. In fact, FUNDENOR was told unless they took a political stand it would not be granted funds to continue its work. It was a very eye-opening conversation about the inside workings of a third world country. After presenting the gifts for the translators, and a lot of picture taking, we got down to the real business of the evening. The SUPER BOWL!!!! Gustavo made us a special dinner-barbecued steak, chicken, and chorizo. Along with the meats he served grilled scallions, stuffed zucchini, black bean paste, with pineapple upside cake for dessert. Finally we had an evening that was a tiny bit warmer and not so damp. Gustavo set up a huge screen TV on the patio and we had our own Super Bowl party watching ESPN in Spanish. It was fun!

February 2: We got up early to a much warmer day and a blue sky! After devotions, and breakfast which included watermelon juice, we left for Najtilabaj. This community is way, way up the mountain where most of the inhabitants work on the huge coffee finca (farm) that surrounds it. Najtilabaj does not have

electricity. Again there were long lines of residents waiting for the doctors, dentists, and optical specialists. Nulo and I were set up just outside a classroom where our three dentists would be working. Since there was no electricity it was good one wall was all windows. The lower part of the windows had to be covered because all the kids were standing up on the hill watching their friends in the 'dentist office'. "Tut" in Pokomchi refers to a woman so Nula started calling me La Tut. Fun! Usually Nulo called me Katie. By noon we had only triaged 22 patients, which left lots of time for good conversation. Yoli (Yolanda, a FUNDENOR exec) and I had a great conversation about earrings (a girl thing), food, living alone, and just life in general. We all have the same interests wherever we live. To help the millionth PBJ go down, I bought more TORTRIX at the local tienda. The sun came out and it turned into a warm, sunny afternoon. Before I traveled down to Guatemala, I made a baby blanket to be given to a child Becky, our pediatrician, thought really needed it. Becky thought Mileybil, a five month old baby girl, should have it. I got to present it! It feels like now I have another grandchild! Just as the team was packing up to leave, the clouds starting rolling in. We drove down the mountain quite a distance before we were below the white fog. In San Cristobol we dropped Bill H. off at the shop to pick up his new custom-made boots. He paid only \$60 American for the boots! They are beautiful! Our dinner was a meat (a 'mystery meat' like in college), rice, a pureed potato and carrot mixture, which was very delicious, lentil soup, and flan for dessert. After devotions we packed and slept one last night at the hotel. Our five days of medical mission work was over. A job well done! We all felt like we had accomplished a lot for a lot of wonderful people.

February 3: We were up at 5:30 for breakfast (pancakes {pronounced pancakezz in Spanish} and melon) and final goodbyes. Each morning I walked down the long driveway to the main road. Each morning I said Hi to the used car salesman in the lot beside the hotel. This morning I told him we would be leaving soon. He asked me for some medicine for a head cold. I persuaded Doctor Bill to give me some meds and I took them to my new friend, Sebastian. It's fun to make friends wherever. By then the greyhound-type bus had arrived to take us to Antigua, the ancient capital of Guatemala, for our last two nights in country. We left Hotel Bella Verapaz at 7 AM. Two hours into the journey the clutch went out on the bus. Needless to say we

were stranded for a while waiting for replacement transportation. Would you believe—we broke down right beside a national park/rain forest/natural preserve for Quetzals, the national bird of Guatemala!!! Some of the team actually took a guided tour and some of us just walked around the entrance to the park and explored. It was a true rain forest—a BOSQUE NUBOSO. You could hear the rain falling, along with the waterfalls, but where we were we did not get rained on. Unfortunately there were no Quetzals to be seen. Two replacement minivans came to rescue us about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours later. Our trip continued to Antigua without further incident. It got warmer as we left the mountains and neared G.C. We arrived at Hotel Aurora by 2:30 PM. What a peaceful sanctuary to end our mission trip in! Kathy T., Pat, and I were in room #1. After stowing our luggage, Stephanie, Paulette, Kathy T., and I went around the corner to the tourist market. Let the bargaining begin! Later the team walked to Las Palmas for a steak dinner. Wonderful! So tasty! The warm evening walk back to the Hotel Aurora was relaxing. The city was vibrant with tourists, horse-drawn carriages, locals, and twinkling lights. The town square was alive.

February 4: At 7:30 the team walked through the town square to Café Condesa for breakfast. Delicious! Margie and Tom did not go with us because Margie got sick overnight. Tom stayed back to help his wife. By the PM Margie was feeling a lot better. Doctor Bill, Anna, and I decided to take the canopy/zip line tour. At 10:15 in front of Las Capuchinas, the shell of an old church devastated by an earthquake, we were met and driven up the mountain to Finca Filadelfia to start the ride up another mountain where the zip line started. There were nine platforms, the last two being 1706 ft. and 1400 ft. long! The view while 'flying' was out of this world! After a pleasant day of everyone doing his/her own thing, we all walked to Posada de Don Rodrigo for an elegant dinner. The restaurant/hotel used to be a hacienda. It is gorgeous! The view from the garden roof is of the whole city of Antigua. Back at Hotel Aurora we had one final evening devotions, talked about 'reentering' our world, and shared communion.

February 5: During kind of a chilly night and we heard what we thought was the wind or lots of traffic. Turns out it was rumbling from one of the three nearby volcanos! We had the continental breakfast at the hotel, packed, and left for the G.C. airport by 9:30 AM. We arrived in Houston at 4 PM and

were back in Cleveland at 11 PM. A long day! But it was good to be home.
Mission completed!

While the dentists (Denver, Kathy T., and Paulette) were at work, the other medical teams were ministering to many patients as well. Margie, Dona, Brad, and Anna triaged men, women, and children, determining whether they should see the pediatrician, a General Practitioner, or Patti who handled women's personal health. Doctor Bill and Dr. Ken ministered to many Maya with parasites, rashes, open sores, very dry skin, 'machete elbow' (we call it tennis elbow), and those who had all kinds of aches and pains from their hard life style. Wood, water jugs, children, food, you name it, is carried on the head. Of course the neck, back and shoulders are going to ache. Becky and Stephanie saw all the babies and small children. One case stands out in my mind. They cared for a baby with chromosomal problems—a baby whose mother does not want it. Becky spent a lot of time when we got to Antigua researching a home that FUNDENOR can get this child into before it is abandoned or dies. Heartbreaking! Bill H., Tim, Pat F., and Maureen were the team that checked eye sight and found a pair of glasses for those who needed them. Sunglasses were also given to those who requested them. Most of the optical equipment and glasses were donated by the Lions Club. Lillian and Tom staffed the farmacia. They were in charge of all the meds and vitamins that had been donated. Over the course of five clinics about 1200 prescriptions were written and dispensed. Any meds and/or vitamins that were not used were donated to FUNDENOR or given to the children's hospital in Antigua. Nothing went to waste! Jerry, our Living Waters rep, spent the week with Miriam, a native Guatemalan and a Living Waters exec. They scouted out possible communities that could support and maintain a Living Waters water purification system. They got a few good leads.

Thank you so much to all who donated money, meds, vitamins, and toothbrushes for me to take to these five Guatemalan communities. Everything was truly appreciated. We gave medical attention to approximately 1000 Maya. Thank you for making this happen!

