

March 2017 Medical Mission

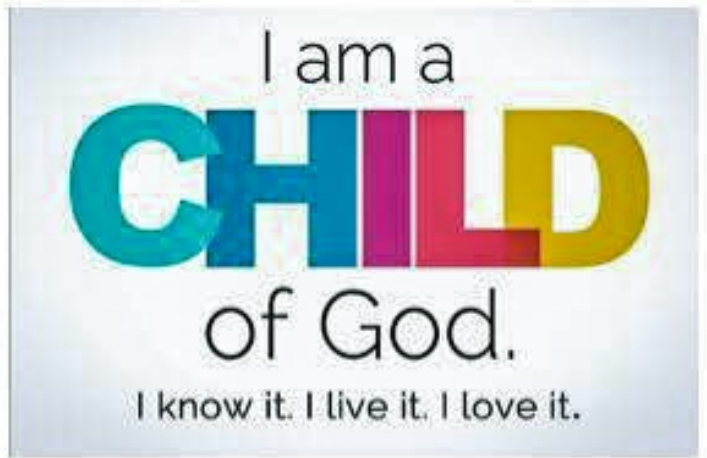
In March I had the opportunity to accompany Kathy Price of Mission of Love and a surgical team to Guatemala City. They were planning to perform cleft lip and palate surgeries on children there that would otherwise not have access to this type of procedure. Having never seen this before I was anxious to both witness the surgeries and also assist where needed in the operating suite. We all arrived on Friday night and met up in the hotel where we introduced ourselves.

I could tell right away that this was going to be a fun group of people to spend the week with! Someone had the bright idea that it would be fun to climb a volcano so Saturday morning we piled into the bus and headed to Volcan Pacaya, about 50 km. south of Guatemala City. We drove until the road ended, approximately 1 1/2 miles from the top. After purchasing some very sturdy walking sticks from the local boys for 5 Quetzales (a bargain at \$.75 US!) we started the trek upwards. It wasn't easy to say the least! The path was rocky, there were lots of tree roots and the soil was very loose since it was the dry season. The further we walked the steeper it became. There were lots of stops along the way to catch our breath and also to enjoy the beautiful view. There were guys on horseback that followed us in case someone fell, or, if they decided that they couldn't walk any longer, then they could ride the horse up. Well, 2 1/2 hours later we were there! Pacaya was rumbling and spitting fire and rocks. It was the most fantastic view! We could see Antigua and another volcano named Fuego that was spewing hot ash into the sky. We even roasted marshmallows over the lava that was still hot from Pacaya's last eruption in 2014! It was an amazing experience and definitely worth the effort.

Sunday morning we went to the hospital to meet the children and their families. Some had traveled up to 4 hours to be there. Many were from the indigenous Mayan communities where access to quality and affordable healthcare is nonexistent. When we walked into the waiting room there were so many smiles and hugs. Parents were happy that their precious children were finally going to receive the long awaited medical miracles.



In the US cleft lips and palates are usually repaired shortly after birth. All the kids were years older except for one 6 month old baby. The doctors evaluated some 40 patients and decided that 23 of them would need surgery. The age range was from 6 months to 23 years. There would be cleft lip and palate repairs, lip revisions, rhinoplasties, fistula repairs and teeth extractions.



Monday through Thursday were exciting days as procedure after procedure was performed by our two very talented oral/maxillofacial surgeons, Dr. Rick Sheetz and Dr. Carlos Ugalde. There was great camaraderie and a spirit of cooperation among all including the Guatemalan surgeons, anesthesiologists and nursing personnel. Quality of life was improved, some dramatically, as they painstakingly collaborated for the best outcome for each patient. This was not the first surgery for some of them. For example, Jose, who was born without a nose and had one built last year from his thigh bone by the docs, needed some repair this year. Or little Roger whose mother kept him alive by feeding him with an eye dropper for three years because he was born with a jaw deformity has had three surgeries. Some of the kids had developed fistulas or noses needed adjusted. Each case was unique, each surgery was a success and it was truly a blessing that God brought everyone together in His own timing for this wonderful work to take place.



The surgical team left Friday morning and those of us that stayed on accompanied Kathy to the Mayan town of Tecpan where we met up with the newest additions to the MOL family-7 orphaned children whose parents died of cancer and one 67 year old abuela who was abused and kicked out of her house by her son. They are now living together under one roof in a beautiful little house right next door to Astrid, a wonderful MOL volunteer, where the grandmother looks after the kids. Truly a miracle of love how the house was just the right price at the right time and the grandmother was in need at the same time!



When we first met the kids they looked sad and a little timid. For two days we took them with us everywhere we went. To the elder activity center where they had practiced for a month to perform a beautiful dance program for us, to an orphanage run by the Sisters where we had a pizza party and they were able to play with 40 other kids, to the Mayan ruins of Ximiche to learn the history of the Tecpan area, to a generous businessman's home where we ate a delicious dinner and enjoyed traditional Mayan music, to just hanging out in the house talking and having a Bible study with the girls. By this time the kids realized that they were loved very much-no more sad faces, only smiles!





All too soon it was time to head back to the city. We said some tearful goodbyes and after a lovely dinner with Lionel and Maritza from the House of God we arrived in Guatemala City and flew out the next morning.



Much appreciation and a huge thank you to those who gave their time and talent for the beautiful Mayan people of Guatemala who are in desperate need of medical care. It's always a blessing to watch God's hand in action as He gathers people together, who would otherwise never have the opportunity to meet, to carry out his work.

Becky Spratt