

Suchitoto, Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, December 12, 2009

Dear friends in PeaceHealth –

It's fiesta day in Suchitoto, a double celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Santa Lucia, the patron saint of this town. Santa Lucia's feast day is tomorrow, but the big celebration happens tonight with processions and Mass and bands and food and LOTS of fireworks. Before the fireworks and the rock bands go into full blast, I'm taking this time to fill you in on the past year of changes and continuity in the PeaceHealth El Salvador Mission.

At the end of this month I will have spent a year in El Salvador. I've participated with Sister Eleanor Gilmore and Kathy Garcia in planning our medical and surgical missions. This year Kathy and I are getting organized for our February general medical mission in San Juan Opico, and for our cataract surgery mission in May. We're in planning a third mission for November involving PeaceHealth volunteers and Bellingham Lions Club members.

My job for these missions is to make sure all the paperwork has been completed and all the arrangements made for our great PeaceHealth and CSJP volunteers. Learning how to do this has made me very good at threading my way through the streets of San Salvador, the capital city, and pretty good at explaining myself in Spanish. It's taught me greater patience, as I share with Salvadorans the experience of waiting in long lines. One reward for the legwork is getting to know PeaceHealth volunteers, exceptionally gifted and dedicated people – fun, too!

I sadly bade farewell to Eleanor at the end of February and in May moved from San Salvador to Suchitoto, a town an hour northeast of the capital that's famous for its colonial architecture and beautiful vistas. Sister Margaret Jane Kling joined me here in July, to my great delight, and our extended community includes Peggy O'Neill, a Sister of Charity who many PeaceHealth volunteers have met. Margaret Jane and I share office space in Peggy's Centro Arte para la Paz, a lively center for art and learning. Our nice big house is Suchitoto-style, built right up against the sidewalk with an interior patio. With four bedrooms we are ready for guests, and we've already enjoyed some splendid ones this year. I hope many of you will sign up for a mission trip ([www.pazsalud.org](http://www.pazsalud.org) - the link to the application is at the bottom of the volunteer center page) or come to visit.

The best of this year has been building friendships with Salvadorans who, as a people, combine great dignity with warmth and joyfulness. When you come for a visit, or if you visit my blog ([www.lapazdesusan.blogspot.com](http://www.lapazdesusan.blogspot.com)), you'll get to know some of the Salvadorans I love and respect - Lita and Dina who worked with Sisters Andrea Nenzel and Margaret Jane Kling in the Calle Real Refugee Camp; Estela, who supported Eleanor and Margaret Byrne's work with Jesuit Refugee Services; Rosita, whose artificial legs don't get in the way of her raising three children; Walther, who's living his dream of a University education thanks to help from PeaceHealth volunteers; Hilda, educating her six children with help from other PeaceHealth volunteers, and many more. I have a special place in my heart for Nubia, an 11 year old girl in Comasagua who's years behind in her schooling because her mother couldn't afford to send her to school. With help from friends, I've been able to make sure that Nubia is getting the education she longs for. We welcome donations to our PeaceHealth fund for the El Salvador mission - checks can be made out to PeaceHealth and sent to Kathy Garcia, P.O. Box 10905, Eugene, OR 97440 (put a note on your check if you'd like it to be used for Nubia).

With all my CSJP community, I have been studying non-violence, and learning much from my Salvadoran sisters and brothers as they confront the violence past and present that has warped their lives and their country. I pray with them that the peace built on justice, respect and love may guide our world in 2010.

Love, Susan



*Fiesta Time!*



*With a cataract surgery patient*



*Kathy Garcia with a new baby*



*Margaret Jane and her friend Lita*



*Nubia*