



PazSalud brigada de ojos agosto 2006
Surgical Eye Brigade August 2006
Lanetta Lundberg

Time to get to work

Friday, August 4

The PeaceHealth members of the brigade gathered in Seattle on Friday, August 4. It was nice to feel one of Seattle's perfect summer evenings; calm, clear and warm. As the evening progressed the members of the brigade gradually arrived. Hilda and husband introduced themselves. Hilda's husband was happy to escort her to Seattle because he was staying in Seattle for the Saturday Mariner game. Ken arrived with his wife Janet.

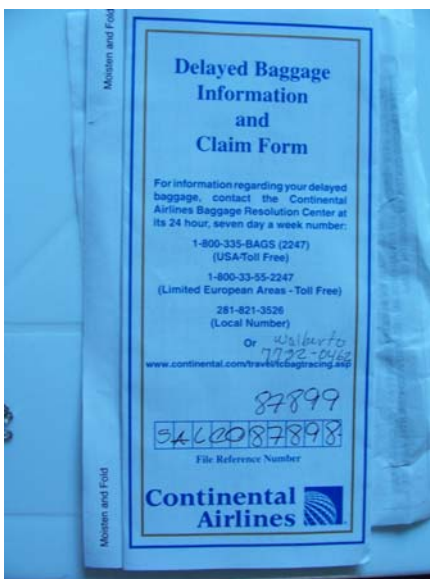


They had been through the drill before and fell into step with unloading and accessing supplies. The rest of us stood by patiently as we watched Kathy in her calm manner begin the orchestration of our brigade.

Systematically and methodically, Kathy had every detail and plan in place. We participated in watchful patience. Not much for us to do but stand-by. Kathy recommended early to bed and early to rise. Our assigned time to meet in lobby Saturday

morning was 5:15. Not a problem, we were all there by 5:00 AM, sleepy, but excited to be on our way. All went smoothly at SeaTac. We had our passports and the checked baggage tags were easily attached to our tickets - then on to Houston. In Houston we spent our layover enjoying appetizers at Pappadeaux's Seafood Kitchen Restaurant. Yummmm...my first bite of deep fried alligator. As our boarding time drew closer, the PeaceHealth and SEE International groups converged at our gate. The introductions were as though we had been acquaintances for a long time. Smiles were automatic and conversation easy. We were getting closer and finally on our way to San Salvador.

We arrived in San Salvador about 8:30 PM. Sister Eleanor was there to greet us with bright eyes and her infectious smile. All was progressing as normal until we discovered the checked totes did not arrive. Ah, what to do? Sr. Eleanor fell into step and began the negotiating process with the officials, filed the necessary paperwork and hoped for the best.



You could feel the prayer chain kick into action. We were all praying in hopeful anticipation the officials and airline would heed our dilemma, locate and transport the totes on the next flight arriving the next afternoon. All we could do was have faith, it was in the hands of the officials. Blanca's stepped in with her convincing plea in Spanish that she was sent to El Salvador to do God's work and it was through the efforts of the officials that would allow it to happen. We didn't want to think about what would happen if our medical supplies did not arrive before we were scheduled to see our first patient. We finally cleared customs, gathered at the bus, met Ernon our bus driver and Sylvia the Salvadorian physician. In no time we had our few bags loaded and we headed down the highway to Tierra Blanca. Travel time was just over an hour. We arrived about 10PM, unloaded the bus, met for a brief orientation and settled in for the night.



Sunday, August 6: Our first look of the countryside in daylight was bright, sunny and very warm. From my dorm window I could see in the distance San Vicente.



Little did I know the mountain was a common sight from most of the country. It looked wonderful to me. As we gathered for our first meal together we were full of smiles as we ate a traditional breakfast of red bean puree, cheese, tortillas. Shortly before 9:00 AM we ventured from the Romero Center and walked the short distance to church.

As the parish gathered for Sunday devotion we were greeted by smiles and welcomes from local residents. It was fascinating to watch the community gather. They may be poor in dollars, but a very rich community in spirit. We were impressed by the cleanliness and kindness displayed. One of the first things I noticed and was struck by was a man wearing a Monsignor Romero t-shirt. I knew Monsignor Romero was well known, but I soon realized evidence of his presence was everywhere.

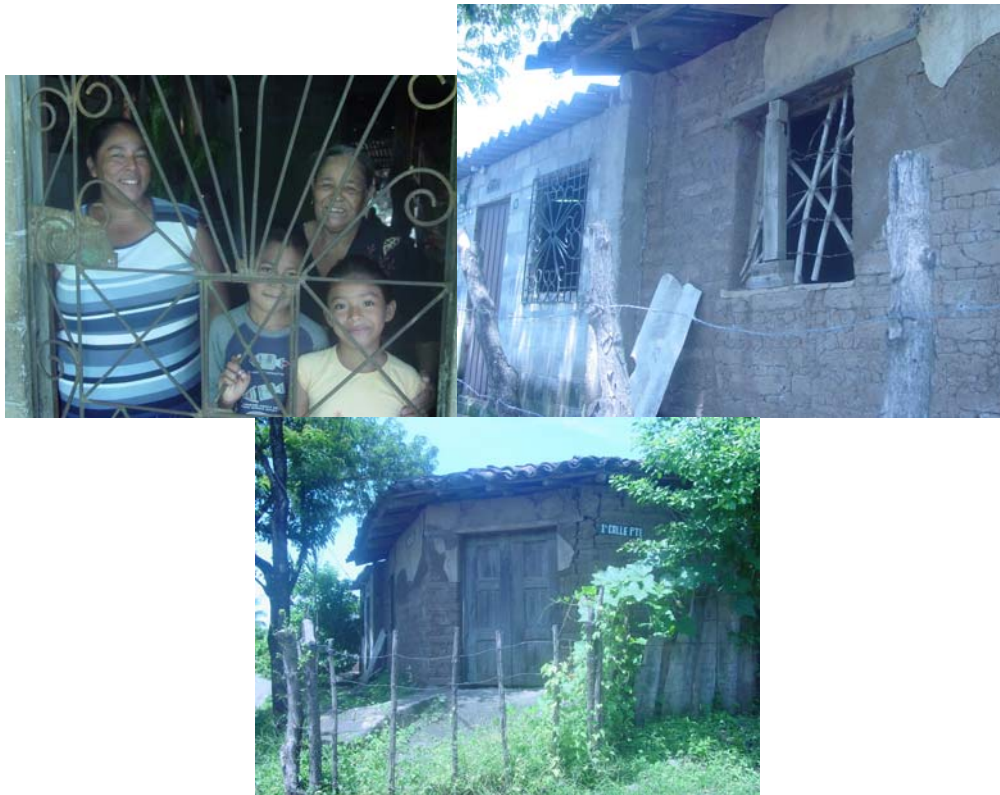
Father Pilar Rivas Sandoval introduced the brigade to the congregation.



Two boys received their baptism and first communion. They were dressed in impeccable white suits.



After mass we were very excited to view the village and started walking.



It wasn't long before we realized we had gone too far and were late for our first appointment. We presented ourselves to the Fundo de Emergencia team with humble apologies. How embarrassing. Don Julio, Carolina (physician from Jiquilisco), Gigi a lay volunteer with the Mary Knoll Sisters, Emilio and 3 medical students were waiting to meet us and go over the plan for the week. The Fundo was the point of contact and coordinating agency for the people. They facilitated needs of the patients and would lead the patients through the process, from start to finish. The Fundo would also manage the follow-up care for the patients.

Selected patients for our brigade were evaluated during the March '06 medical brigade. People from Teirra Blanca, Usulután, Jiquilisco and the surrounding aldeas (villages/countryside) within the general area came to the March medical brigade. The eye exam is a very popular one and through these exams a total of 55 patients were

accepted for the Surgical Eye brigade in August. This would average 11 procedures per day. We learned the patients ranged in age from 54 to 88 years old and of the 55, 9 had already dropped from the list. That left 46. We could see the surgeon's eyes roll.

After our meeting with the Fundo, we boarded the bus and traveled on the highway to Jiquilisco for our first glimpse of the quiet contented land. Or so it seemed. We were to learn that underneath there is a definite structure and cast system. The people are born into and learn their positions. A handful of families control the economics of the country. These families are very powerful and dominate the currency, economics and even politics.

We arrived at the hospital in the early afternoon to preview the facility, get a sense of where we going to be stationed and assess the OR. Throughout the afternoon Sr. Eleanor continuing to check on the status of the missing totes loaded with the medical supplies. We could only hope the officinados were sympathetic and were tracking the where-about of these valuable medical supplies. We wouldn't be able to set-up or start surgery without them. You could tell this was weighing heavily on the minds of the team, but were faithful for a positive outcome. We headed into the hospital confident and enthused. We did a quick tour of the patient rooms and the OR. I'm sure the staff was curious and a bit taken aback by our swooping with eagle eyes. We were trying to take in as much as possible, assess the facility and how we could put our action plan into place as quickly and efficiently as possible. That was from our eyes. Now take a step back and take a look from the eyes of the staff. In retrospect, it must have seemed like an invasion

to their established and calm world. Through gentle and diplomatic conversation with Janet the OR RN, Sr. Eleanor began paving the path to the inner sanctum of OR. In a few short minutes she had the surgeons and nurses donning scrub attire. Of course, our scrubs had not arrived, so Dr. John, Dr. Lowrey, Kimm and Hilda borrowed scrubs, masks, head coverings and booties from the hospital supply. They looked out of the



world of Florence Nightengale.

This was our first taste and feeling of returning to a time in the past. The closer we looked, the closer we appreciated the advancements made in US medicine.

During our time in the hospital Sr. Eleanor received a call from the airlines – **THE MEDICAL SUPPLIES HAD ARRIVED!!** The airlines even offered to deliver the totes to a location of our choice. Blanca's pleading and prayers had worked. She was now able to do the work she was sent to do. Sr. Eleanor asked for the totes to be delivered to Jiquilisco hospital and then follow us to the Monsignor Romero center in Tierra Blanca.

As we waited, it was our first introduction to a warm afternoon without a breeze, this would become a very common feeling.

Sunday evening was spent making up surgical packs and going through the surgical supply tubs. Sr. Eleanor provided an orientation with history.

