



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

Friday, August 11

We were on our way and a short distance from the Romero Center Friday morning, when a young man driving a cart with 2 oxen met us at an intersection. I had been waiting most mornings to photograph the oxen and cart as it went by the Romero Center and always missed it. I was so excited. Ernon stopped the bus, I grabbed the camera and hopped off to take pictures. After a couple of pictures more team members also got out and we stormed the cart. The driver sat there in surprise, but once again, patiently allowed us to take pictures, hop on the cart and show our joy at the experience. The oxen were patient until one oxen had had enough and raised its tail. We decided it was time to retreat. For his kindness and patience the driver was given a couple of dollars. Not much for us, but it was probably more than he made in a month. We gave many loud, abundant thanks and were on our way. The exchange didn't take more than 5 minutes, but what fun.

We wrapped up the final 4 surgical patients on Friday morning – wow, it felt like such a milestone. Ken continued to do eye assessments, handed out eye glasses and tirelessly received each Salvadorian with a smile. He mentioned more than once that he felt his work was not just giving glasses, but it was public relations. We could all see how

successful this philosophy was. We didn't see one person walk away sad. They all felt so special and appreciative of anything that helped their eyesight.

We closed up shop in the mid-afternoon and headed to Bajia de Jiquilisco located not far from the town. Bajia de Jiquilisco is an estuary off the Pacific Coast providing good access for the fishermen to unload and take their catch of the day to the local markets.

We enjoyed walking along the water front, watching the fishermen unload their catch, see the children swim in the water, watch the people milling about and enjoyed a cool drink of cerveza or lemonade. It felt good to know the surgeries were done and we were on the down hill stretch. That evening we celebrated with a special dinner of papusas. It was fun to know our devoted cook saved the best for last - and so delicious.

Saturday, August 12: On Saturday morning the Friday surgery patients had their post-op examinations along with any patient who had surgery during the week. Everyone was invited to return for another examination. The number that returned was amazing.



All patients received instructions to wear their plastic eye guards for at least 2 weeks. It was truly amazing that the patient's eyesight went from legally blind to seeing 20/50 and many at 20/70. Through the skill of the surgeons and dedication of the team we all felt the wonderment of success.

Following our brigade the patients would be receiving their follow-up care by the ophthalmologist, Dr. Elizabeth Gonzales (second from the left) at her clinic in Usulután.



Once all of the examinations and hugs were done, we were asked to go to the Outpatient area for a Thank You ceremony. We had been hearing all week to anticipate an exchange of gratitude, but when we entered the area we were delighted to see all of the patients, their family and friends, hospital staff and the Fondo de Emergencia leaders clapping as we entered. It was an emotional high. Many thanks and words of appreciation were exchanged. Don Julio introduced his team of providers and we were given an award of appreciation. Our brigade also had gifts of thanks to present to the leaders and volunteers; Lilian, Denis, Gloria, Orbelina, Dra. Carolina, Hna. Hortensia (Tencha), Magali, Andrea, Marta, Jaime, Gigi, Kim, Julio, Eligio, Karen, and Cruz for helping with the surgical brigade. We all left with a feeling of joy and happiness.



Sr. Eleanor settled our bill at the Cafitina for the meals we had during the week. We were each provided a mid-day hot meal and all of the drinks we needed. We enjoyed drinks served in plastic bags with straws: fresco de coco, fresco de melon, fresco de ochita con leche (spiced pina (pineapple) with manazana (apples), fresco tamarindo (seeds). Main meal items were papusas, frijoles, pollo (chicken), carne (beef), pez (fish), papas (potatoes), arroz (rice). For all of this the bill was \$130 – not just for one person to eat for a week, but a team of 12.



We said our goodbyes and headed to the Romero Center to load up our bags and then to San Salvador. As the route would have it, we took a detour to Costa del Sol for lunch. All of a sudden we changed from a serious, dedicated, hard working team to children at play.



The beach was beautiful with sun, surf and warm breeze. It didn't take us long to throw our shoes aside and feel the hot sand between our toes. We felt so spoiled knowing what we had left behind. If we could have packed our patients into the bus, we would have taken them with us to feel the joy.

We could have spent many hours at Costa del Sol, but headed for San Salvador late in the afternoon. The countryside started transforming with large industrial buildings, more populated residential areas, hillsides dotted with houses and many more cars. There were no more small herds of cattle grazing or being herded alongside the road. We were also transforming into visiting tourists. Sr. Eleanor showed us the chapel where Monsignor Romero was shot and the mural depicting the people of El Salvador painted outside the gate. It was an eerie feeling to drive past the same way his assassins did 26 years ago. Our final dinner together was a time to de-brief, offer thoughts and suggestions to Sr. Eleanor and Kathy.



We managed to make it through most of the conversation in spite of a strong thunderstorm with heavy rain and the electricity going out. The loss of electricity must be a common occurrence, because the restaurant staff said the lights would be back on in 5 minutes. Yes, they were. By now we were like sisters and brothers and our good-byes shared lots of hugs and best wishes. Dr. John, Dr. Lowery and Margaret would be leaving us early the next morning for their return home.