



Hands of Hope Mission

Medical Mission to Guatemala

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Transition

November, 2008

It looks like 2008 was another year of transition, at least the spark of transition. Anita has been travelling back and forth to Guatemala quite often, and this summer when Gregory visited, they both decided that the time was right to again consider moving back to Guatemala full-time in 2009.

2008 Our 10-year Anniversary

We moved to Guatemala fulltime in April, 1998, and this November marks ten years since we first started doing medical work in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Mitch which hit Guatemala on November 1, 1998.

The full story is on our website - but we started off using our little red 4x4 Trooper SUV, then we converted a bus and finally we moved into our own 2,500 sf clinic building in the mountains of rural Guatemala. Lots of changes!

We started out with Anita, one doctor and our bus driver/assistant. But now the clinic is blessed by the dedicated efforts of twelve people. See *the list on page 3*. Our clinic is still the only medical clinic for the three villages, with a population of about 10,000.

When we see the long line of 70 or more patients, mostly women and children, waiting for the clinic to open in the morning, we take a deep breath knowing that the day will have its challenges. Many of these patients have walked more than an hour to the clinic, hoping to be able to get in early so that they can return home in time to get some work done in the fields, or do the daily work and cooking in their dirt floor shacks.

It's hard to remember when long lines weren't the norm. When we first started coming to these rural mountain villages we were some of the only "white people" that they had seen. We didn't realize the significance of that issue at the time. We didn't understand why mothers would pull their children inside the houses when we arrived in the village with our medical bus and then peek out at us from behind almost-closed doors.

At first, very few people would come for a medical visit when we arrived with the bus. It did help a great deal that our

doctor and assistant were Guatemalan, helping the locals to look past Anita, the tall and pale Canadian! It was about a year later that we heard that villagers were still keenly aware of an ancient Mayan "prediction" that warned indigenous people of the dire consequences of interacting with white-skinned outsiders. *As if we didn't have enough challenges already at that time!*

Within six months of visits with our medical bus the villagers seemed to understand that we were there to help and give them the medical care that they could not find or could not afford. But now we can't drive in those villages without hearing shouts of "Anita, Anita" at anyone who drives "Anita's" pickup truck. Children and mothers wave and smile at us and of course, ask for a ride!

Over the years we started working with other groups and one we now have a cooperative agreement to work with Common Hope (www.CommonHope.org) - to deliver educational help in our villages. Through Common Hope's sponsorship, more than 160 children are able to attend school and our clinic provides their medical care.

Our next joint project is to raise the funds to renovate the school kitchen which is now nothing more than a dismal room. Each school day the helpers cook *atol* (a hot nutritious drink made from corn, rice or oatmeal) in a huge pot over a smoky wood fire built on the floor. This daily drink and sometimes a small snack are important, because they can be a major part of the children's daily nutrition. Gregory expects to get the kitchen renovated by late Spring 2009.



Letty, *Clinic Manager*, Julia, *Nurse*, and Glendy, *Pharmacy Assistant*, are valuable and trusted staff members. Thanks to generous donations of medicines and money we are able to stock the medicines we need.

We also worked to push the government to complete a water system that now distributes clean drinking water to 95% of the houses in the main village, San Rafael, where the girls and women used to walk for as long as 20 minutes to carry all the water they needed. We take so much for granted, don't we?

Over the years we established the **Christmas Blanket Project** and we've been able to raise donations to provide up to 1,000 blankets each December. Many people are surprised to learn that it gets cold in Guatemala. The country seems to have a reputation of being so warm, even hot. But up in the mountains at 7,400 feet elevation, December often brings temperatures of close to freezing. **Can you imagine trying to keep your children warm if all you had was a dirt floor shack made of cornstalks, and the cold wind easily found its way inside?** So the blankets are very much appreciated and we hope to raise \$5,000 to provide at least 1,000 blankets again this year.



Ten years is a pretty long time. **Can you remember what you were doing in November 1998?** It's easy for us because that's when we first started what we thought would be a six-month medical effort. We're not sure how the time flew by so fast, and we're also not sure of what the next ten years will bring. But we have an idea that the next phase of our work will provide just as much excitement as the last ten years.

Florinda

Florinda, 27, came to the clinic at the end of the day. She was trembling and looked extremely upset and had come to share some devastating news.

Her life has been very difficult and she had endured constant abuse from her husband before he had run off to start a family with another woman. She works full-time and cares for both her young child and her elderly mother. She had thanked us for financially helping her to attend school on Saturdays so she could realize her dream of becoming a health care worker. That dream had seemed impossible to this sweet woman who had been forced to quit school in 3rd grade in order to work and help her struggling family.

In a soft and shaky voice, she recounted that coming home from class on one of those Saturdays when there is no bus service to the village, her life turned into a nightmare. The driver of a pickup had offered her ride home to her village and she rode in the far back of the pickup bed along with other items he was hauling. But instead of driving her home, he suddenly veered off the road, jumped out, pulled her out of the truck with a knife to her neck and the assault and torture began. After violently raping her at knifepoint he left her in the bushes, bruised and devastated. Later, she managed to walk the last three miles to her dirt floor home she shares with her daughter and mother.

Shame and fear kept her from sharing her story except with

her mother. Her mother told her the same thing had happened to several women in the village, even some of her own family. She assured Florinda the best thing was to "forget it". And now, six weeks later, here she was at the clinic confirming her worst fear - she was pregnant. She cried and cried knowing that if anyone else found out, she would be scorned and mocked and even cut off from the other villagers.

Florinda decided to leave the village to have the baby in secrecy, not able to face the certain torment of the villagers. Behind the scenes, we found a temporary home for her. Several people donated money so her mother and daughter could continue to have food and basic needs while Florinda was gone. Florinda insisted that she wanted to place the baby for adoption. Adoptions are almost closed in Guatemala to non-Guatemalans despite the fact that very few Guatemalans are interested in "having another man's baby" in the house. However, we did find a local family who is so excited about adopting the baby, who was born recently.

Now, almost seven months later, Florinda has returned to the village only to face many hateful, untrue and accusatory rumors. With her permission, we arranged a meeting with her friends and family to explain what had happened. One of the ladies then came forward and told almost the same story of violence and shared her fear, saying that she kept it a secret for years because no one would have believed her. The ladies all gathered around and cried and prayed for each other. This is the first time the women felt permission to share personal tragedy and grieve for themselves and each other.

We expect to have more village meetings and discuss the issues of rape, abuse and violence that so badly need to be brought out in the open. Our hope is that in this way the victims can get the help and respect they deserve and the opportunity to reclaim their lives.

Francisca with Cancer

Last year we mentioned Francisca, who had been diagnosed with terminal cancer and given only a few months to live. She doesn't receive chemotherapy but as of today, she's still alive and doing quite well despite open sores. She receives clinic care, some food, bandages and medicines to alleviate her pain. She really appreciates the emotional support and kindness she receives when she comes to the clinic.



Amazing VBS – Over 600 Children Attend

The *Galilea Church* in San Lucas along with Rachel Giagnocavo and some youth from the USA helped put on a three-day VBS event in our village, San Rafael, in July.

At the village school classes run from 7:30 am to 12 noon so we planned a 1 pm start time. We expected 300 children, but when we were ready to open the doors of the farm co-op building we were using, 600 children were noisily waiting to get in! Many young girls had a younger sibling to watch, and some even had toddlers tied to their backs. We know there are many more young children in the area, but so many have to work in the fields to help their families . . . so we hadn't expected the huge turnout!



Great fun! For three days, more than 600 children, mothers and babies piled into the farmer's co-op building to participate in the VBS activities.

The children were enthusiastic and giggly with excitement. They sang with all their might and participated so well. Many mothers came with their babies and they sang, laughed and made crafts, too, along with the children. Despite the fact that we had sixteen youth and helpers, it was still a challenge to do crafts with so many children, but they paid close attention during the games, dramas and stories, and proudly showed the workers their finished crafts.

The children were having so much fun and didn't want to leave, but we had to get them out and clean the building so the farmers could bring in their harvest to the co-op building we were using. With the last child barely out the door, the farmers were already arriving, so we had just enough time to get the place swept up. The children and the mothers appreciated it so much, and begged us to hold this event again next year.

Ricardo and the Hospital Medical Scam

A 19-year old mother came to the clinic carrying her baby and asking for help because her husband Ricardo had fallen off a cliff while working in the fields. The land surrounding the villages is steep and limited, so the farmers often work right to the edge of dangerous cliffs. At the hospital it was discovered he had a broken femur. The doctor requested a large amount of money and gave her a slip of paper with a bank name, account number. He said Ricardo could have the operation as soon as she made the deposit in that account. Because she had no money, she came to the clinic for help.

She showed us the slip of paper the doctor had given her. Something was very wrong and suspicious because public hospitals are mostly free for the poor of Guatemala.

Rosario, a Guatemalan lady who has worked for our clinic for many years, met with the hospital social worker to see if

Ricardo could get a price reduction. It doesn't help when Anita asks for discounts because as a "gringa" (American woman) they assume all Americans have unlimited money. The social worker told Rosario this type of operation was free and the family didn't need to pay at all. **The doctor was simply trying to pull a scam** - the bank account was his own and he probably gets away with this scam almost all the time. Thanks to our intervention and the the social worker, Ricardo had his surgery the same week for no cost.

However, four months later Ricardo still could not bear weight on his leg. We sent him to *Hermano Pedro*, a private hospital in Antigua sponsored in large part by American resources. The doctor there immediately realized that Ricardo's surgery had been poorly done on purpose, and would not heal without another surgery. This doctor heard the story of the scam and said that many times a patient will receive substandard and purposefully-poor surgery if the doctor doesn't receive his illegal secret payment.

Ricardo will now get proper surgery and we're going to exert influence to stop that wicked medical scam.

Amalia and Teresa

Thanks to generous donations, we are able to sponsor these two girls to go school to become teachers. This January will be the start of their last year of training. It's been difficult for Amalia because her mother is not in favor of her going to school. She wants Amalia to stay home and work and contribute to the family, and stop studying. Amalia was so desperate to study that she now works long hours all weekend to make and sell beaded belts, giving the money to her family. We hope to help Amalia sell her handmade belts starting in January on our website and, on www.etsy.com.

Our Clinic Staff

- **Letty Amezquita**, *Clinic Manager; basically runs the place*
- **Dr. Efrain Teleguario**, *General MD; speaks the Mayan language*
- **Dr. Jim Hines**, *Internist and general medical; from Texas, volunteering his time to help us in the clinic.*
- **Julia**, *Nurse from Guatemala*
- **Terri Caton**, *Nurse midwife, a volunteer from Pennsylvania,.*
- **Rosario Chacón**, *Intake, office manager, and counselor*
- **Señora Reyes**, *assistant to the doctors, translator for local language and works in pharmacy*
- **Señora Cristina, and Señora Gilberta**, *general helpers; prepare daily nutritional drinks; have busy job to keep the clinic clean.*
- **Señorita Glendy**, *assistant and pharmacy helper*
- **Karen Leier**, *helps with intake and pharmacy; she, her husband Joe, and family are from Canada, here as full-time missionaries*
See the Leiers at www.FreelanceMissions.com
- **Anita Giagnocavo**, *Nurse and co-founder of Hands of Hope*
- **Rachel Giagnocavo**, *proofreader and occasional helper; VBS*

Did you know? Each year we serve as many as 6,000 patients, use hundreds of cans of baby formula, tens of thousands of vitamins and antibiotics and pay for many surgeries for those who are very poor and have no other options.



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There are many worthy charities, so we know you have many choices.

If you'd like to "help us help the helpless" you can donate online or by mail and you'll receive a tax-deductible receipt. Contact us if you have medicines or other items to donate.

Hands of Hope Ministries, Inc. is a registered 501c3 non-profit organization.
Donations are tax-deductible in the USA www.Hands-of-Hope.com

Dr. Jim and Kay Hines



We're particularly pleased and very much blessed that Dr. Jim and Kay Hines have chosen to volunteer at our clinic since 2004. They had been on mission trips to Guatemala since 1984, and God planted a seed in their hearts that led them to decide to move to Guatemala on a full-time basis in

2004. Dr. Jim closed his successful Internal Medicine practice that he had in Texas for 27 years and they moved to Antigua, Guatemala to begin language school. The women and children who come to our clinic tell us how much they appreciate the kind and considerate care that Dr. Jim provides. And anytime we need her help in the pharmacy, Kay is quick to cheerfully volunteer.

Kay and Jim are also very busy and active at *Prince of Peace Home*, a wonderful children's home for girls where Dr. Jim is also in charge of the medical clinic there. Kay is very busy helping in that clinic and working with and mentoring the girls at the home. Read all about it at: www.PrinceOfPeaceGT.com

You can read more about the Hines' medical mission and contribute support at <http://www.gmm-web.org>

We're ready for the next 10 years – Thanks to you!

We'll be expanding the programs we work on and we plan to help build houses for the most needy. Perhaps you'd like to help us to help these villagers who work so hard and have so little, many of whom barely survive.

If you would like to help, you can specify specific programs such as food for widows and malnourished children, vitamins and medicines, or the **Christmas Blanket Project**.

And we're always grateful for generous financial help to cover the approximately \$5,000 a month needed for general clinic operating expenses, costs of medicines, x-rays, lab tests, and corrective and life-saving surgeries.

Thanks to all the many volunteers and visiting teams. They are a great help to us in our medical work among the poor indigenous villagers of Guatemala.

Sure it's a bit difficult sometimes, but we feel truly blessed to do this work, and truly grateful for all the kind prayers and generous financial support we've received over the years.

Thank you all so very much!

Sincerely, Anita & Gregory Giagnocavo

Donations accepted online at www.Hands-of-Hope.com
or by check to 3500 Cleveland Street, Hollywood, FL 33021

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