Walking Together: Andy’s Story

“I always believed that God had a special plan for Andy.” Andy’s mother Gilma spoke these words shortly after their three-month stay in Houston, Texas. Most would have thought her belief fantastic, impossible. Andy, 18, had cerebral palsy. His family carried him most places. He could only drag himself short distances with the use of a walker. His body was continuing to collapse upon itself. He lived in a small town in Guatemala where there are virtually no services to support those with disabilities, no opportunities for medical care to improve their conditions. And, yet, for 18 years, Gilma believed and prayed. She trusted in God and she believed in her wise and kind son.

It had not been an easy road. After years of knocking on doors that never opened, Gilma brought Andy to the Dr. Nancy Glass surgery team at Las Obras in May 2014. There the Glass team told them that the extensive orthopedic surgery that would allow Andy to stand straight, walk independently, was too challenging to be done in Guatemala. Seemingly another door had closed. But that was not the end of the story.

The Glass team sprang into action. Dr. Allison Scott committed to obtaining permissions from Shriners Hospital and to perform the operation. Neal Gorman and Dr. David Mann committed to welcoming Andy and Gilma into their home. Neal saying, “If we thought about it too long, it would have been easy to find reasons to say no. So, we just decided to do it.” The team committed to lend support during Andy and Gilma’s time in Houston. Faith In Practice staff, Shelly Darnall in Guatemala, Megan Henry in Houston, committed to shepherding the process that would bring Andy and Gilma to Houston for his operation.

Visas, airline tickets, paperwork, months of wondering what would happen next came and went. Finally, Andy and Gilma arrived in Houston in October. Fear and trust, anxiety and prayer intermingled as the day of surgery approached. And, was cancelled. Andy couldn’t do it. Not yet. More prayer and conversation. Faith In Practice volunteers encouraging, loving, regardless of Andy’s decision. More prayer, until the day when Andy entered pre-op surrounded by Faith In Practice volunteers.

The surgery went better than expected, followed by the hard work of physical therapy. Weeks of challenge, improvement, tears, laughter. A delay in returning to Guatemala. Originally anticipating a six-week stay, Andy and Gilma spent 12 weeks in Houston. Through Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year’s. Through the fear of a surgery, the disappointment of a cancellation. Through the painstaking physical therapy. Through shared hopes and dreams. Until the day when Andy walked independently off the plane in Guatemala, and his father’s “heart jumped” to see the change in him.

It is not possible to capture the thousands of intimacies that unfolded across days, weeks, months. The long quiet hours together. Kathy Vrabec and Nancy Glass visiting Gilma during her long days in the hospital. David carrying Andy. The painstaking hours upon hours that Neal walked beside Andy with patience and love. Eddie with his quiet and gentle way ever present to support. Tish’s kind competence. Kathy’s larger-than-life laughter and hugs. So many surrounding Andy and Gilma, Neal and David. The ways that Andy’s eloquence, wisdom and abiding

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come true. I want to continue to improve, complete my studies as an electrician, and, in the future, become a part of Faith In Practice to help others who are incapacitated like me.”

For the Glass team? They will return to Guatemala this May, open yet again, to have their hearts broken and filled beyond measure. Wondering what God has in store next. And, of course, to see Andy and his family. Special thanks to:

- Shriners Hospital, for what they do every day;
- The Glass team, for their compassion and commitment;
- Neal Gorman, whose humility and selfless love calls each of us to love deeper;
- All of you, who faithfully support this mission, so that we may say ‘yes’ rather than ‘no’.

For more on Andy, visit www.faithinpractice.org/andy.

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Choosing to Trust

Our US volunteers choose this mission, in faith, not knowing what it will mean. They trust in the One who tells them it will be hard, but that he will bring forth new life. Volunteers who choose Guatemala in spite of their pain and loss, trusting they will meet the One who shall bring healing to their pain.

Our Guatemalan volunteers and patients choose to see the blessing and miracle in horrific circumstances. They trust in the One who sits beside them in the pain and leads them to new life. Good Friday and Easter are near. It is in these moments that we choose to trust in the story once again. Not only because of words on a page, but because we see crucifixion and resurrection unfold before our eyes in this mission. Not because of a long-ago historical event, but because we see the Crucified and Risen Christ before us, sitting beside us, raising us up, to new and abundant life.

In these sacred days leading to Good Friday and Easter, we thank God for all the ways that you choose life, with courage, trusting in the One who invites us all into new and abundant life each and every day.

— Rev. Linda L. McCarty
He stood before the Guatemalan volunteer leaders at the annual conference in November. From El Quiché, Efraín’s second language was Spanish. Shy, tentative, as he stood before these experienced leaders, he thanked Faith In Practice and Medical Teams International for the commitment to bring medical care to his community. But, then he said, “Thank you for giving me the opportunity to answer God’s call to me, which I have been feeling for a long time in my heart.”

Four years ago, executives from Providence Health Services* gathered in Washington State to find a way to honor and continue the mission of the Sisters of Providence. Most had never been to Guatemala. Most had no real sense of what might grow from the seeds they sought to plant. Since that time, with faith and trust, Providence has partnered with Faith In Practice, Medical Teams International and Landivar University in Guatemala. They have honored the Sisters’ legacy even as they have sought to listen for God’s new calling to them. Faith In Practice has been blessed by their faithfulness. Surgical teams, medical clinic teams, new possibilities. And, we are blessed by Medical Teams International, which provides public health services globally, their work in Guatemala concentrating in El Quiché.

Four years which led to the moment when Efraín spoke. Plans, strategic partnerships, identified goals leading to that moment. And, then the reminder. It never has been, nor will it ever be, about an initiative. It will always be about the moments that cause a shift in an individual heart.

In April, Providence, Faith In Practice and Medical Teams will work side by side to provide medical care in remote Chicamán, El Quiché. Working side by side, seeking the small moments that will surely cause a shift in the hearts of others, listening for those same moments in our own.

*Providence is the third largest not-for-profit health system in the US.

Hilario Galindo: Calm and Stormy Seas

Hilario Galindo was alive with activity. Edgar, Gervasio, and Ernesto, Faith In Practice volunteers, had brought patients to the hospital. The Johnson, Thompson and Kincaid/Tyss medical clinic teams had evaluated patients in their villages and now the dedicated volunteers waited with these same patients for the Coke surgical team, which was arriving the next day.

Construction workers were pouring concrete and setting rebar. Board member Larry Barker and architect Pelayo Llarena were walking the site, making adjustments, looking at time lines. Walls were rising.

Hilario Galindo board members were arriving to discuss the financials, the teams and clinics anticipated for 2015, the new day care center the Municipality would build, and to hear about the two weeks of surgery that had just ended. The energy was high.

Only one year ago. As many of you know, last February, we delayed the expansion of Hilario Galindo due to circumstances beyond our control. It was a hard, challenging time.

Watching the joy and energy at the hospital, it did not seem possible. Only one year ago. So, in the midst of the bustle, we stopped to give God thanks. For God’s faithfulness when we had lost faith. For God’s vision, when we could not see.

For God’s knowing that one year later we would be closer, more committed to each other, the future of Hilario Galindo, and those who would receive care there. And, so grateful for the trust you have always placed in us in calm and in stormy seas.

Construction is ongoing. The patient guest house, a new pre- and post-op area, a medical staff break area, new windows and bathrooms in the ward spaces, and a new chapel will be complete by year’s end. Then on to the next phase!

For more, visit www.faithinpractice.org/hilariogalindo.
Walking Beside Them

Throughout Lent, the people of Guatemala carry him, weep for him, because they know he understands their pain. They carry him with humble gratitude, because they know he lightens their own burdens bringing them great joy. Guatemala, a reflection of the hard and beautiful Crucifixion and Resurrection toward which we walk in these sacred days of Lent.

Please consider a gift, as together we walk beside them, seeking to lighten their burdens in his name.

May your Lent and Easter be blessed.

Bring healing to the Guatemalan poor

☐ $1,000 Orthopedic Surgery
☐ $750 General or Gynecology Surgery
☐ $500 Medical Trunk Filled with Surgical Supplies or Clinic Medicines
☐ $250 Visit to a Medical Village Doctor or Dentist for Five People
☐ $100 VIA/Cryotherapy, Cervical Cancer Screening for 10 Women
☐ $50 Room & Board for a Recovering Patient at Casa de Fe

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