Saying So Much

On Monday, we saw 436 patients, 129 in general medicine alone. One patient, a middle-aged woman, stood out. As I was finishing my notes, I noticed that she had started to cry. She had presented with several different symptoms and I thought I had addressed each one with a diagnosis and a plan to help her. We had discussed extensively her intermittent abdominal pain. After a bedside ultrasound, I informed her that she did not have gallstones and she would not require surgery.

It was soon after that she became upset. I pulled my chair closer, waited a few seconds and asked, “You seem very sad. Can you tell me why you are crying?” She hung her head lower and subtly shook it, “no.” I thought back to things I said that might have upset her. Maybe I had missed her true concern; maybe she was frustrated that I had not listened well. Maybe she feared that none of the therapies we discussed or the prescriptions she would receive would truly help her pain. Maybe there had been a terrible miscommunication.

“I don’t want you to leave crying. Is there something else bothering you? Is there something else I can do for you?” I thought of the times patients in the emergency departments where I have worked became irate when they heard their scans were normal and their symptoms did not represent a dangerous diagnosis. Rather than being relieved, they doubted our competence. They were convinced that we did not know enough or that someone had misinterpreted the scan. Sometimes patients experience such miserable symptoms that no amount of testing can reassure them. I braced myself as I asked this woman again what made her suddenly so sad. She continued to wipe her nose as her tears ran, but looked directly into my eyes.

“Thank God you are here. It’s just that I am so thankful that you are here. You are saying so much to us. I just can’t believe that you all came here and that you are giving us this opportunity. May God protect you and guide your way. Thank you for coming. Thank God you are here.” She hugged me.

There are few moments so humbling as those that show us that Jesus is working through us, despite our limitations. It is mercy that allows us to share light with one another, and to be his hands and feet. I thankfully realize that my American cynicism does not have a place in our Faith In Practice clinic. I am changed by a grace that bridges two lives to bring peace and healing to both. Once again the American volunteer is touched and healed by the Guatemalan patient.

— Dr. Lauren Taylor, Delk Medical Clinic Team
Petén February 2016

According to the Pan American World Health Organization, in the Department of Petén, Guatemala, there are 1.7 physicians per 10,000 residents. For the entire Guatemalan population of 15 million, there are only 13,900 physicians, 73% of which are in the Guatemala City area.

Dr. Taylor, shown above with her father, Stephen Taylor, and the Delk team saw approximately 1,800 patients during four clinic days. Through their actions, they were saying so much, “You are a child of God; you are not forgotten.” And, they were blessed by God’s children in return.
Looking at Her

Looking at her,
I recognized you, Jesus.
Now I no longer have any doubt.
It was you.
I saw your wounded side
where the mark of the spear was still visible.
I saw your hands
covered by the wounds
you received in the house of your friends,
where you shared wine and bread…
hands that gave sight to the blind
and raised up the infirm.

I saw the scars
of your feet, wounded
to open up a simple path
towards the heart of your little brothers and sisters.

Yes. It was you.
Because I recognized the marks of violence
all over her body
and the calm and tranquil expression
of one under the easy yoke and light burden
of an irrevocable love.

— Julia Esquivel,
Guatemalan Poet Laureate

Irrevocable Love

Why Guatemala. That is the question I most often receive.
Of all the places in this world of need, why Guatemala. The answer is complex and simple. Just like Guatemala herself.

I suppose the answer is found in their eyes. María’s eyes. So young and yet a depth, a calmness there, which belies knowledge beyond years. Juana’s eyes. Appearing to be over 60, and yet a twinkle that reveals the young woman she was, still is. As if in their eyes, young or old, an entire lifetime is held. Accessible, palpable. Elusive, mysterious. Drawing us in. Drawing us more deeply into their eyes, demanding somehow that we look more deeply into our own lives. Challenging us. Beckoning us. To be more authentic, more present.

Maybe it is because they live so closely to the earth. Or their life is so hard. Or their faith so deep. It is hard to say. And, yet, they never fail to demand something of me. Forcing me to see, somehow, what I could not otherwise see. Revealing to me a challenge, a call and claim on my own life. Revealing to me a beauty that transcends. A beauty that transcends her life, that transcends mine.

Carrying “the calm and tranquil expression of one under the easy yoke and light burden of an irrevocable love.”

— Rev. Linda L. McCarty
Holding Their Stories

Children and their families swarmed about him in Hilario Galindo Hospital’s waiting room. In the midst of the chaos, Noé calmly bent over his list of names. Patient after patient, carefully recorded. Anji, 8 years old. Surgery Thursday. Luis, 3 years old, hernia. Surgery on Tuesday. Pedro, 9, surgery Monday. Child after child. Scribbles organized on a page holding the story of months of waiting, the hope, the anxiety. In blue ink, their story and the story of the man who leaned over the spiral notebook, confirming every detail.

Just a few days ago, Noé was busily organizing the medical clinic in Sibana where the Chenault village team had served. Not only ensuring that all was ready for the team, he and his fellow volunteers had slept on the floor in the school to watch over the medicines and equipment. Following four days of grueling work and hundreds of patients, the exhausted yet happy Chenault team prepared to return to the United States.

But for Noé, the work continued. The next day, he traveled with his little charges, referred by Drs. Hennessy and Nix, to Dr. Tecúm at Hilario Galindo. With his kind and gentle way, Dr. Tecúm welcomed them, making certain every child had the necessary tests for surgery. Noé then stayed with these little ones and their parents at the Casa de Milagros patient guest house, meeting the Mann surgical team as they descended from the bus on Sunday morning. He was there with each patient as his or her name was called during triage adding their names to his list. Throughout the week, he stayed with them. Professional, compassionate, committed.

At the end of the surgical week, Noé had checks by many names in his spiral notebook, including Dr. Tim Lee’s patients, Anji, Luis and Pedro. But there were others who still awaited surgery as the team prepared to leave. Of course, Noé will shepherd them to the next team, and the next, until all names in his notebook have a check beside them. His notebook, holding their stories.

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Our dedicated Guatemalan volunteers and hospital partners make it possible for us to fulfill our commitment to continuity of care for our patients. For their selfless and humble service we give God thanks.

He Kneedled and He Prayed

And, then, Dr. Tim Lee came into the preoperative area of Hilario Galindo Hospital. Dressed in blue scrubs, he approached Anji’s bed. And, he kneeled. On the floor. Before the gurney. And, he prayed. He prayed for Anji, for her mother, for himself, for God’s healing, guidance and grace. He prayed for them all.

In those moments, Susan felt Anji’s mother’s shoulders relax. She felt her breathing slow, a calm coming over her. In that moment, there was no longer bright lights and the scary prospect of a surgery. In that moment, there was the glow and peace of God’s love binding them together as one.

Anji, Pedro, Luis. Child after child. Tim prayed. Their parents prayed beside him, with him, for him. And, in those moments, there was a peace. A peace that surpasses understanding.

During the week, many parents promised to continue to pray for the volunteers. Just as Tim had prayed for their children.

A peace. A new understanding as the Prince of Peace continues to break down barriers and build bridges among us.

Susan Eyre is Faith In Practice’s beloved Board Secretary who also serves as a translator in Guatemala.
2016 FAITH IN PRACTICE GALA

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Drs. Enrique Batres and Susan Sponenberg
Dr. Jaime and Vilma Tschen

Celebrating the Community that God has and is creating among Guatemalans and Americans, a beautiful mosaic through which God’s love shines. Where humility and glory touch.

“A mosaic consists of thousands of little stones. Some are blue, some are green, some are yellow, some are gold. When we bring our faces close to the mosaic, we can admire the beauty of each stone. But as we step back from it, we can see that all these little stones reveal to us a beautiful picture, telling a story none of these stones can tell by itself...That is what our life in community is about...Community is where humility and glory touch.”

— Father Henri Nouwen

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