

DIARY OF HONDURAN MISSIONARIES

February 18-24, 2007

By Sharon and Ron Brown

Sunday - After months of training under our marvelous leader, Bob Penn, we arrive in Tela, Honduras, on the Caribbean coast. The afternoon is spent in setting up, especially at the clinic, 12 miles away. At 6:30, we break for our daily meditation. The Reverend Anna Neitzel led us in these times of reflection and inspiration. These sessions, which were our intimate group times, held twice daily, set the tone and provided a framework for our mission. Our reward each evening was a great meal together. Bob Penn selected excellent restaurants for our evening meals, on the theory that this little army will need to march on its stomach. Our hotel's extensive menu has about 25 ways to serve shrimp, earning its nickname "Bubba Gump's." Lunches at the Texaco station are the stuff of legend.

Monday - *Que dia!* We were a whirlwind of activity – 12 to the clinic, including our two MD's, 4 to our one-room school to conduct health and hygiene training, and the rest to move dirt at the school in anticipation of the new water well. The Hondurans are so very nice and appreciative of our presence. The 44 children in the school (K – 6th grade) are healthy and very active. The kids hug us a lot.

Tuesday - Another fast and furious day. The schoolyard is getting filled in, and the bathrooms are almost complete in anticipation of the well. Just to be clear, we are not hand digging a well, we are assisted by "Living Waters International," which drills fresh water wells all over the world. Clean water can do more to improve the health of a village than almost anything.

The clinic continues to work miracles. The docs are seeing about 150 patients a day, with volunteers doing intake, triage and dispensing meds. Many patients will walk several hours to come to the clinic. Every afternoon, 5 or 6 of the group spend time with the children doing Christian education projects and games. They go through a mountain of construction paper, crayons, stickers, tape and glue. And then there is the work crew who can be found cleaning up debris, hauling dirt, chipping plaster, and painting, all in the warm, humid conditions.

Ash Wednesday - It was a typical workday, perhaps the hardest, ending with our group joining the Episcopal Parish of Espiritu Santu for Ash Wednesday services, in Spanish. It was very meaningful – they knew how to pass the peace!

Thursday - Thursday was a good day of teaching the children in both their health and Christian education sessions and working with the mothers. One of the mothers went into labor, had her baby at 6:00 PM, and was home by 10:00 PM. The well is completed, but we are unsure of its quality. The highlight of the day was a visit from the Episcopal

Bishop of Honduras, who joined us for our evening devotional and dinner. He absolutely awed us with his faith and humanity. He is a native of the African immigrants living in Tela, and has accomplished great things from his humble beginnings.

Friday - We wrapped up the various programs. We also scrounged the supply room and came up with a care package for the new mother and took it to her in her lean-to house. She was so appreciative and proud of her new son. What will become of him? At the end of the day we had a celebration at the school in Sauce, attended by the local congressman, members of the school board, the kids and parents. We sang, they sang, there were many speeches and presents. The mothers served us a wonderful meal of grilled chicken they had spent the day preparing. The children had rice, a reminder of their severe poverty.

Saturday - Clean up day and pack for departure. We dismantle what is left of the clinic. The clinic saw over 600 patients and dispensed most of the meds. That evening we were the guests of honor at a celebration at Espiritu Santu. There was dinner and a show by the drummers and dancers of the Garifinas, an African enclave that has maintained their culture for more than 100 years.

Sunday - It was an amazing trip and experience. Our group of 24 kindred souls, worked together, taught together, played together, prayed together, and ate together. We heard before we went that we would receive more than we gave. We gave our time, work, money, gifts, teaching, but also our smiles, handshakes, attempts to speak their language, hugs, as well as a lack of pretense and superiority. What we received is harder to describe. We moved freely among some of the poorest people in the Western Hemisphere without fear or temerity, but instead as partners in bettering their fragile community. We learned that our fascination with things and money is so superficial and devoid of human meaning. We learned how to rely on each other for everything from work details, creative solutions to problems, transportation and moral support. We learned that, working together as a team, with each doing his or her part, we could accomplish more in a week than most people can do in a year. We learned that clothes and hair and makeup don't matter. We learned that we are all God's children and all in this together.