

Honduras Journal - September 2006

Dear Family and Friends,

We're home! Nick and I arrived safely home on September 24 from Honduras. We were only there for one week, but our experiences were so intense that it seemed like much longer. I know and could *feel* how blanketed we were in prayer. Thank you for that. We are extremely grateful for all your support. Your love and encouragement is more than we could have ever hoped for.

Our trek from Potts Grove, PA to San Francisco de Yajoa took about 18 hours. I did not know driving, sitting, flying, waiting and standing in line could be so tiring. The travel time went by quickly as Dr. Benner used every opportunity to teach and inform us of the history of Honduras, state of the country now and history of MAMA Project (her life's work). There were many stories of despair and others of hope. I tried to absorb it all.

Saturday, September 16

We arrived without any travel problems to the airport in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. (It was not a good feeling for me not knowing the language. I immediately felt disabled). Once through customs, we gathered our luggage, consisting mostly of medical supplies. We were a small group of 5: Dr. Priscilla Benner (founder of the MAMA Project 20 years ago), Dolores Schiesser (retired nurse), Wendy Ho (Physicians Asst), Nick and myself. Leaving the airport, I was surprised by all the young boys begging for money. Olivia, on staff of MAMA, was there to take us the Mission House in the town of San Francisco de Yajoa. This would be our home for the week. The drive was instant immersion into a far different culture. As we drove through San Pedro Sula, the industrial capital of the country, we passed by many factories ("sweat shops"). We are told that here is where crimes go unnoticed. Many sweat shops abuse workers, use child labor and commit other crimes. They are owned by the very rich and no voice is given to the oppressed. We drove past fast food restaurants like Wendy's and McDonalds, as well as fancy looking shopping malls. Strangely, intermingled in the midst of what seemed so typical to us, were simple shacks (people live in them). There were many people on bicycle and horseback, buses were packed full of people too, and pickup trucks were piled high with children in the truck bed. There were countless pineapple and banana stands along the road. We saw lots of unfinished construction and old dilapidated buildings. We got a crash course on the disparity in Honduras. The rich are very rich and the poor are very poor. Few middle class. It was evident here in the city.

We finally got to San Francisco do Yajoa. Here was the was the most breathtaking scenery! Beautiful mountains, lush and green, palm trees, coconut trees and beautiful flowers. I felt like I had entered a different world. Here people rode donkeys, horses, and some bicycles. Young boys were carrying machetes to and from the fields they worked. Young girls carried baskets or bowls full on top their heads. Lots and lots of beautiful children! We saw corn fields, beef cattle, skinny cows, goats, horses, dogs, cats, sheep, chickens of all kinds and roosters that crowed continually. (We evn saw a dead horse along the road.) None of the animals looked well-fed, and most certainly none of the children were. The adults looked hard and old. Priscilla explained that poor nutrition means men do not have the strength and stamina they could. Women have unhealthy pregnancies and often unhealthy babies that are unable to fight or even survive their unhealthy environments. There is much to fight against - little or no knowledge of cleanliness, sanitation or proper nutrition. The poverty was as unmistakable as the gorgeous scenery. These are living conditions we could not imagine. I cried in disbelief. It was so beautiful here! How could this be? I had never seen poverty with my own eyes before. This was real and a lot to absorb.

The Mission House was a beautiful sight, just as I had seen in pictures. Situated at the foot of an inactive volcano, there is still evidence of lava rock all over. Since there were so many cows, I first thought the lava rock piles were cow pies! The house was plain and simple with a common eating area and large dormitories on either side of the building. Once at the house - quite comfortable with electricity and bathrooms! - we met Dr. Herman Sagatume. He is the Honduran doctor on staff with MAMA, and living in the U.S. He had come ahead of our group to unload a shipment of medical equipment donated by hospitals in PA to the public hospitals in Honduras. Part of our work this week will be to deliver the equipment directly to the doctors. Our itinerary also includes visits to 3 remote mountain villages, as well as a very important meeting with the Ministry of Health officials. Herman and Priscilla are both very excited about the opportunity. I am eager to get started.

Often the conversations among our group are intense and revolve around the injustices throughout the world. Much of what is discussed I am embarrassed to say, is unknown to me. Some of the tremendous injustices are hard to believe. What I did understand was that Nick was among adults sharing his same convictions and passion about justice and being a voice for those without a voice. Conversation was very stimulating. There is so much for me to learn and try to understand.

Sunday, September 17

The first morning in Honduras I awoke to the most beautiful sunrise at 5:15 am. Here the sun is intense right away. I think you could get a sunburn by 5:30am. There is much to take in. I hear mooing, crowing (lots of crowing), bleating, chirping, and geckos making their own sound! Here roosters crow all day and all night. (Strange!). I smell fires burning, for cooking already. From the "glorious" front porch of the house is a picturesque view of mountain ranges, some in the clouds, and beautiful blue sky.

The house overlooks the town. Some small homes (shacks) are near enough to see people feeding the chickens or washing clothes. Very few vehicles pass by. Somehow they travel roads we would consider impossible at home - rocky, unpaved. Here people easily maneuver around children and animals. No rules! Too fast! I can hear children playing by 6:00am Here the sun sets and it is completely dark by 6:30 pm. Days begin early and end early.

We leave for the 4 hour drive to the capital city of Tegucigalpa. We will deliver some of the donated equipment to the "Principle" or main hospital of the country. The entire trek there was unbelievable. We saw many squatter villages, poverty over and over and heard many of Priscilla's experiences. (This was my prayer: God, please give me the strength to hear and see and *not fall apart*.) The city of Tegucigalpa was beautiful. Herman showed us some homes of the wealthy for comparison's sake. They were lovely, with high fences surrounding them. Most also had barbed wire atop the beautiful fencing. Strange, they must not look out their windows, because the view almost always was of the poor. The saying here goes: The rich can't sleep at night because they are worried about what the poor might do; the poor can't sleep at night because they are hungry.

At the hospital, I am first struck by the armed guards at the entrance of the gate. We are allowed in, and then can't help but notice all the people lying on the steps of the hospital entrance. Are they sick? Waiting for someone? This is the largest and most advanced public hospital in the country. It looks outdated and not maintained. We meet Herman's friend Dr. Herbert. He will give us a tour of the hospital making note of the undesirable conditions that exist currently. We are struck again by the run-down conditions everywhere. And there was no air conditioning or even fans. No air was moving. It must have been 100 degrees. It seemed the ER and OR were run together. Workers have stained scrubs. Nothing here is disposable. Sterilizing equipment is not always possible. Equipment is often outdated or broken. The doctors want to improve these conditions, but the government is simply not willing to listen. Money is given, allocated to a hospital, but never reaches it. The system does not work. Herman and Dr. Herbert agree that their generation of doctors are dedicated to improving hospital conditions for the people. Good things are beginning to happen, they say, such as our donation of ultrasound and mammography machines.

We visited Pediatric Intensive Care. I wanted to run away. The beds were filled with young children and babies. It smelled bad. The air was thick. Strangely, we heard almost no crying. These children were dying and not even strong enough to cry. We saw a child with a bowel obstruction, another with a heart defect, several with pneumonia and premature babies. I had planned to pass out small goodie baggies to the children here. Small gifts of crayons and coloring papers. But these children were dying. How pathetic my small gift. It seemed so meaningless. I was struck by the absurdity. I held onto the goody bags.

A young mom's 8 day old son was born with a serious heart defect. She looked hopeless and dejected. She would probably not be able to afford the heart surgery to save her baby's life. It would cost about \$50 Herman said - too much for her family to afford. Another mom was using torn rags as compresses to bring down her unconscious child's high fever. I saw a nurse sort through a dirty laundry bin to find a bed sheet that was (maybe) a little cleaner, for another child's hospital bed. Conditions like this simply do not exist at home. I was overwhelmed.

Next to the child with the heart defect was a baby with pneumonia. He was receiving oxygen but the doctor had no way of monitoring the saturation. The reason for our visit to this department was to deliver an oxygen monitor. The doctor immediately unwrapped the donated equipment, hooked it up to the child, and within minutes knew how to adjust the oxygen. This equipment quite possibly saved the boy's life. The doctor was so happy to have proper equipment for his patient. This brought great joy to our team, and hope to us all.

In our country so much is disposable, or highly sanitized after each use. Perfectly fine equipment is "disposed of" simply because a newer model is available and so are the resources. MAMA Project is working to bring some better equipment into this country. Next we continued down another dreary, dirty hallway. It was full of people just waiting. There were many children, and they began coming up to me asking for the goodie bags. Somehow they knew what I had to share. It felt good to share the small things I had brought along. The children were excited and I was felt extremely blessed by them!

We finished our tour and heard and understood Dr. Herbert's plea for more help from U.S. - and were leaving the hospital when a man was brought in on a stretcher (not a gurney) by 2 paramedics. The man was surrounded by several family members. Once in the door, they headed to the ER. A doctor from our group walked up to them, took the man's pulse and pointed to the large sign "MORGUE". The man was dead and no one had noticed. As we were leaving, we saw the hopelessness and the suffering. Is there a solution somewhere? It was all so hard to see.

Monday, September 18

Also in Tuguca, we met with the department of the Ministry of Health. We walked to the meeting in the busy city. It is crowded and hot. Most people were dressed up for their city jobs. Others looked obviously homeless and/or mentally ill. Suffering people were all over the streets. They seem to be ignored. Nick made it a point to give his lunch to one poor man just standing in the middle of traffic. Another woman, probably mentally ill, was crying, lying on the sidewalk and Nick gave her something to eat. As we walked through the city, we apparently drew a lot of attention. Not too many white, blond-headed people around. They called Nick "Monk" or "Priest" and I was just "White Lady".

At the Ministry of Health office I noticed the terrible office conditions. (I had a better set-up as a payroll clerk in the Finance Office at Bucknell University.) The people are very welcoming and eager to share with MAMA Project and hear our proposal. Dr. Benner and Dr. Sagatume (Priscilla and Herman) ran the meeting and I tried to follow along. The Ministry of Health is quite pleased with MAMA Project's 20 year history in Honduras. I am in awe of the vast amount of humanitarian work and obvious results MAMA Project has accomplished. Herman and Priscilla also stress the importance of continued Vitamin A distribution and de-worming for people in all villages. This has been key in reducing severe malnutrition. The hope is that by forming open communication with the government, conditions will continue to improve. Education is also key to improvement. There is still so much poverty, malnourishment and resulting deaths in the largely untouched western part of the country.

It was time to return to San Francisco de Yajoa. Tomorrow will be the first day for our medical/dental brigade in a village. Tonight we will spend preparing and packing our supplies, as well as a chance to meet the moms and children currently staying at the Nutrition Center. The supplies we need are stored in the Nutrition Center located near (walking distance) the Mission House. While packing up, we were able to learn about the history and work of the Center. The Nutrition Center and surrounding small buildings serve as temporary homes for mothers and children at risk. Some come with one sick child and must bring all their children along for the month-long stay. Some come with their newborns and are unsure how to care for them. Whatever the case, the mothers are taught how to properly care for their children, proper nutrition and hygiene. Often mothers are very young and have many children. Here at the Center they are helped by being educated. It is empowering to these women.

Time at the Center was fun! My luggage (& Nick's) had been packed full of small gifts. It was intended to be shared with any and all children we would meet. This is the part I had eagerly anticipated! What joy it was to give the stuffed animals (met with squeals of delight!), children's clothing and hats, lots of "goodie" bags with coloring pages, crayons, markers and lollipops. We also shared some puzzles and other art supplies. The children were so grateful! They were laughing, giving big hugs, holding my hands. What a thrill it was!

Tuesday, September 19

Our first village is Elenantro, translated means "Enchanted". It was almost an hour's drive from our Mission House. They were expecting us. Medical Brigade visits are planned and arranged in advance by MAMA staff. This visit also included a dentist. It is estimated that this was about the 3rd visit from MAMA brigades in the last 4 years. People had not had regular medical attention since the last visit over 1 year ago! Although, if a villager is very sick, sometimes arrangements can be made to drive the person to a hospital. (Good luck with that!)

Our van traveled up mountains with postcard views. We saw coffee bean fields - all

farmed by hand - pineapple groves and sugarcane fields. I was not sure what to expect. Priscilla has given each of us our assignments. Our group of 9 consisted of: Priscilla and Wendy serving as doctors, Dolores as the gastritis and scabies nurse, (Gastritis is common due to parasites and Scabies is usually a common problem too) Nick as the pharmacist (issuing all meds prescribed by the doctors), and I would be the "exit" person issuing the supplies (soap, toothbrushes and powder, bandaids, Neosporin, vitamins for children and adults, and diarrhea meds). I was most looking forward to sharing the goodie bags and other small gifts we had brought along. I was also looking forward to using the Polaroid camera to take pictures of families together. (I had to use the film wisely - we have enough for about 30 pics for each of the 3 villages)

We were joined by 3 MAMA staff - Pedro, who will interpret (thank you God) and evangelize, and play guitar. Felix and Rosa would pass out Vitamin A, de-worm all children and give a nutrition presentation using a flip-chart. They would weigh the children and take the adult's blood pressure. Francis, newly graduated from dental school, will be the dentist on the team. She is completing the required year of service working with MAMA Project. It was amazing to see how each person used their unique skills and gifts.

We were greeted by a very eager crowd of about 150-200 people. The crowd made it difficult for us to carry our equipment to be setup in their schoolhouse. Priscilla noted that there seemed to be no leadership in this village, therefore no order. We setup as best we could, in the chaos. People were excited we were here. (You'd think we were the Beatles or something!) I was amazed at how happy they were to see us. It was very humbling. The children were dressed in their best for us. We prepared to take over their schoolhouse - no school today! Today was a special holiday for them. Priscilla and Felix explained the order, Pedro sang to greet them and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There was excitement in the air.

First to come through the clinic were the older men. There were maybe a dozen or so with very high blood pressure. I helped Nick count out a year's supply of medication for each of them. We all helped each other too. No one lost their patience. I appreciated this since I have to ask about nearly everything more than once. It seemed to take hours for the men to get through - lots of severe gastritis needing treatment too - a large dose of medication followed by prescription to take along. Nick was doing an amazing job filling prescriptions. He was quick to learn and the people love him. He was compassionate and eager to understand what they were trying to communicate. I was deeply moved by Nick's efforts. How sweet it is for a mom to see her child shine!

As each patient left, I would give the "exit bag" of hygiene items. I tried to give enough for the entire family, but had difficulty communicating my question of "how many in your family?" Even if I was successful in asking, I usually couldn't understand the answer! Nick helped me out a lot, but I made a mental note to know some Spanish before my next trip. I would feel a lot more useful! We met many sick children. One boy was suffering from Rickets - a condition resulting in abnormalities in shape &

structure of bones caused by vitamin deficiency. The mother says he is always unhappy (very obviously unhappy with us) and Dr. Benner explained that he was in pain all the time. She talked with the mom about proper nutrition and we gave a full year's supply of vitamins (& maybe some other meds). Rickets has been wiped out in the U.S. for years. Dr. Benner was adamant about the fact we have the knowledge and resources to wipe out a lot of the childhood diseases in the rest of the world too. No child should have polio, rickets or blindness as a result of vitamin deficiency. So many problems are easily preventable. All children should benefit from what we have learned. Prevention should not be reserved for the wealthy. We stopped briefly for a quick lunch of PB & J and watermelon. Hondurans do not like peanut butter at all (they think it is gross). Therefore, no one was wanting to share our humble lunch!

Through the chaos no children were crying or whining or even arguing among themselves. Dr. Benner believed they did not misbehave as you might expect because they simply do not have the energy. They were malnourished, lacking vitamins and personal hygiene. By 4:00 Dr. Benner insisted we were finished. We did not get to see all the people, but trusted we saw those who needed medical treatment most. We did our best to make sure everyone received their bags of supplies, and that all children had a small gift. While our team was packing up, I tried to take some polaroids. However, I created a mob scene! I was surrounded (literally) by mostly children - about 10 deep. They were shouting and grabbing for me and the camera! Of course I couldn't ask them to step back or stop...eventually though, I was able use up all the film I had, taking as many group shots as possible. They seemed to have the energy to fight over these photos! I understand most have never seen a picture, much less *themselves in a picture*.

We got back to the Mission House before sunset. All brigades leave villages in time to return before dark. It was simply an issue of safety. We enjoyed the evening discussing our work so far. Pedro and Nick played guitar together. We tried to join in singing - but I decided to leave that to Francis and Olivia. It was a treat to here their beautiful voices singing praise & worship songs in Spanish.

Later that evening a woman visited with 5 of her children and several of her grandchildren. We share our goody bags with her children and grandchildren. They are thrilled! Wendy helped to translate, and somehow the 3 of us communicated. The woman knew Dr. Benner who had helped her before. She may have lived at the Nutrition Center at one time. Whatever the case, she told us of how she had 20 children of her own but 11 had died in childhood. How heartbreaking. She spoke of her many grandchildren and insisted we visit her home sometime so she could make us a chicken. This woman barely survives, and she wanted to feed us! I am amazed at her generous heart. That seems to be the norm though. People here are so generous though they have so little of their own. It was an exhilarating, heart wrenching, exhausting day.

Wednesday, September 20

Our next day's visit to a further mountain village was off to a better start. The view atop the mountain and school grounds was gorgeous. The sky was picture-perfect and there was a slight breeze today! This village was well organized and led by village monitor "Gomer". The people were eager to help carry our many supplies and set up. Gomer expressed his gratitude for our presence. He thanked God and asked a blessing over our work here. He was very committed to helping his people. He wore dark sunglasses, smiled a lot and of course I couldn't understand a word he said. But you could see his gentleness and true concern for his people. He stayed within the clinic all day, offering assistance when he could. We were able to move people through with more ease today. We saw a lot of scabies, lice, gastritis and hypertension. A young boy (1 ½-2) had a bad infection as a result of being uncircumcised. I helped Dr. Benner by holding a flashlight while she examined him carefully. She prescribed antibiotics and referred him to the nearest hospital for a partial circumcision. Today I also made a point to watch Francis and her "dental clinic". People lined up all day to have hurting teeth extracted. She was busy without a break. Her clinic is crude at best. The patient sat in a plastic lawn chair, head back, paper towel in hand, and a trash can to spit into. Little anesthetic was given. Francis was obviously very gentle and quick - quite experienced by now in tooth extractions. Her equipment was rinsed in bleach water and laid out on a table covered in paper towels. I heard no moans, yells, screams.

At lunchtime, the village school teacher offered us soup that had been prepared by some of the village women. There was enough for everyone. Dr. Benner felt certain our sensitive stomachs would handle it since the soup had been well-boiled. It was a beef stock with lots of cabbage, carrots, rice and plantains (like bananas). Interesting, and delicious. It was served with tortillas, as is every meal in Honduras. Also on the lunch menu was Nick! He played his guitar and created a great deal of curiosity among the villagers. At first they didn't seem to know what to make of this gringo. He was head & shoulders above even the tallest Honduran man. He was bigger than them, with striking yellow hair and a very distinct dark amish-looking beard. They were certainly drawn to him. Their curiosity turned to admiration. When he was done playing his music, he closed up his guitar and all the people started chanting (something in Spanish of course), and stomping their feet. Priscilla said they wanted an encore! Nick felt honored and got his guitar back out to entertain some more. They loved him!

Shortly after lunch we finished our clinic. We had successfully seen everyone! This was a smaller village than the day before - we estimated 100 or so children and adults. And since it was better organized, we wasted little time. There were crayons, markers and gifts for all the children. Actually, I had run out early on. But somehow God had multiplied what was left in my bag and there was enough for everyone. (How cool is that?) I was also fortunate enough to take polaroids of all the families. They loved it! It seemed like magic watching the picture develop before their eyes. What a blessing!

After packing up, Gomer had more words of thanksgiving and praise for us. He invited us to see his home and visit with the oldest member of their village who was unable to

come to the clinic. We hiked down the mountain first to Gomer's house. About 11-12 people lived here in this very humble 3 room home. The floors were cemented. This was another initiative of MAMA Project. A cemented floor drastically improves health conditions because so many parasites are eliminated that otherwise were a problem in the dirt and mud. Walls of the home were not solid - not even exterior walls. Another sign of advancement or higher standard of living was the cook stove -fireplace sort of setup - had a chimney leading outside. Many homes are smoke filled and create an unhealthy air quality. Also, Gomer's home had a small silo for dried corn. I think it may have been the supply for the entire village. In his possession also were the medical supplies for the entire village. It was the equivalent to a small home-size first aid kit - but this was all he had available for 100+ people. We left as many extra supplies with him as possible.

Next we walk to the elderly woman's home. She was called "Neecha" and was 84 years old. She did not seem to want or need medical care. She was just happy for us to visit. She looked very feeble and thin. She told us how difficult life had been for her. She and her husband had 9 children, 2 had died. While they were young, her husband fled for fear of his life to El Salvador during wartime. She raised her children alone, and never heard from him again. It had been a difficult life. We sensed she was no longer willing to leave her home. An older son lived very nearby. We visited with him too. Neecha also demonstrated how she would grind corn every day to make tortillas. Her simple one-room home had a bed - no mattress to speak of - and a wood stove for cooking. We saw one blue & white china tea cup. Her only real dish. Other "dishes" made from coconut shells (I think). Life here was so hard. She was grateful we came, and offered us her only avocado. We thanked her anyway, took many pictures and left her with a Polaroid of her and her son.

That evening Pedro shared one of his own original songs. It was beautiful. Called "Missionary" the lyrics: "You who have been called to work for the Lord, don't stop serving Him, follow Him with love. And with the freedom that He gave to your life, come before Him until you get the victory. You are a missionary of the Lord. He always helps you to proclaim the Gospel of liberty, You are a missionary of the Lord, He always helps you to proclaim the freedom from the world."

Thursday, September 21

After 2 days of medical/dental brigades to the villages, we had another day at hospitals in the city. We drove to San Pedro Sula to deliver medical equipment to 2 different public hospitals. The first is Hospital Leonardo Martinez. It is a referral hospital for the public. We delivered an ultrasound machine to the maternity wing which had just been completed in 1/06. The wing had been donated and built by the Japanese and was quite nice. It was a huge change from the Principle Hospital in Tegucigalpa. Still, once inside we noticed things that were quite different from our hospital maternity wards. First, all women in labor were in one large room. No privacy, no family (even fathers) allowed. The delivery room was much the same - one big room. We saw a very newborn set of

twins and another baby. We were greeted happily by the Director of this department. He was very pleased with the ultrasound machine and explained how much they needed one especially for women who travel from the villages with difficult deliveries having had no prenatal care. With the ultrasound, the baby's position can be determined.

Our next stop was the Hospital Catarino-Rivas. Just days before, several pieces of equipment donated from the states was delivered here. We were here to make sure it had arrived at its intended destination. We also met with the hospital administration. Media was present to film the hospital officially "receiving" the donation from MAMA Project. It was a pretty big deal since often in the past donated equipment has not gone to the hospitals in need and instead had been sabotaged by corrupt government officials. As we saw each piece of equipment in place - EKG machine, Mammography machine, EEG - there was great satisfaction for MAMA Project.

At both hospitals I am struck by the number of people lying on the curb, steps and walkways outside the hospitals. Some are obviously very ill, others are sleeping. Hospital Catarino-Rivas we also toured the newly built equivalent of our Ronald McDonald House. It was dormitory-style free lodging for family of patients in the hospital. We were told by the Director of this facility that it was originally started by McDonalds Corp, but they decided to pull their funding. The hospital itself raised the funds to complete the project. It was quite nice and clean. I noticed that the "family activity room" had absolutely no toys. The only thing that would indicate it was kid-friendly was the odd assortment of toys and stuffed animals suspended from the very high ceiling. These were definitely out of reach of the children and adults and I suppose were for decorative purposes only.(?) Funny thing - there was a blond haired Barbie with only a shirt on-no bottoms - dangling by a string around her neck. This struck us as odd, ironic, funny! (Hey, I thought the Honduran people loved white, blond-haired women!) Our work was done here in San Pedro Sula. It had been a long day, time to head back to our Mission House in San Francisco de Yajoa.

We spent the evening at the Nutrition Center. I enjoyed taking polaroids of each of the mothers with their children. There were also 4 orphans (2 brothers, 2 sisters - ages 4-9) that had been living at the Center for 2 years. They are parented by whomever is staying there at the time. Their mother, an alcoholic, abandoned them but I understood she visits occasionally causing only additional problems for the children. The children were beautiful and seemed starved for attention. They seemed happy, clean, healthy and so sweet. They truly melted my heart. They had also been sexually abused by their father. From what I understood, Honduras has no "social services" or "child protective agencies". So, at least for now, the children are safe at the Center. They are welcome to live there indefinitely. They are cared for by all who work and live there. The Center is staffed full-time by a director and a doctor.

Friday, September 22

Friday we went to Alea de Portillo Village. It was a small village (100 or so) about 1 ¼

hours drive from the Mission House. We were first greeted by the monitor "Victor". He had great love for his people. They had been eagerly awaiting our arrival and anxiously helped us unload and unpack. I was surprised by all the chickens, roosters and dogs at our feet. Many strayed into the schoolhouse where our clinic was set-up. It seems an amusing sight. I am again humbled by how gracious the people are. We enjoyed prayer together, and Pedro's music. Then Felix and Rosa along with Dr. Benner, offered instruction. We were all deeply concerned for one young mother. At 22, she was very anemic with a high fever and pneumonia. Her 2 year old son was mildly-moderately malnourished. She did not bring her newborn along, but Dr. Benner assesses that this mother and her children are at risk. This is a family in crisis. Dr. Benner urges her to return with us to the Nutrition Center. She refuses, but we are hopeful Victor can convince her later. Obviously she was feeling very ill, maybe unable to consider such a trip.

We also met a family with many difficulties. The father had broken his femur in a fall and had poor treatment at the hospital. He had not had any physical therapy and had lost most muscle in the leg. His crutches were mismatched and the wrong size for his frame. Priscilla showed him proper exercises and encourages him to begin moving the leg to build up strength. His 8 year old son suffered from severe asthma. Priscilla demonstrated a nebulizer treatment when no electricity is available. (None of the remote mountain villages had electric service) She used a bicycle pump attached to the tubing leading to the mouthpiece. It worked well and Vincent, the monitor was right there to see how it was done so he could offer his assistance later. The young daughter of this same family suffered from some jungle disease. They were so grateful for all the help they received. I again was given the awesome gift of being Polaroid picture-taker and goodie bag distributor. The families were so happy with their own pictures. And again, I was not surprised that there ended up being just the right amount of goodies for the kids. It was awesome. I also noticed something that transcends cultures. At the end of our clinic, we again gathered as a large group and listened to Vincent share his thanks and Priscilla noted how impressed she was with how smoothly this village could operate - and that Vincent's leadership was so strong. Earlier I had handed out balloons, and noticed a young girl who blew up her balloon part way - only to have her brother smack it out of her mouth. She immediately reached over and pinched him *hard!* Brothers and sisters act the same no matter where in the world they live! It was heartwarming! As we were leaving, Vincent again thanked us and offered a prayer over our work and that our descendants also be blessed. Then there was music and praise. It was an unbelievably fulfilling day.

Back at the Mission House we had a special dinner. It was our last evening here. The week has gone by quickly, though it felt like more than a week's worth of experiences and emotions. MAMA staff and volunteers (that includes us) joined together to share a meal and thoughts from the week. There was need for constant interpretation since majority of us only speak one language or the other! (Translating must be very exhausting). We laughed together and talked about the "crazy" driving here in

Honduras. Herman had commented earlier in the week that he is easily bored with driving in the U.S. No challenges! No livestock in the middle of the road! And speed limits! Who needs them! The meal like all meals was simple and delicious. Every meal was accompanied by fresh made corn tortillas and lots of fresh fruit. The pineapple, papayas, bananas were all wonderful. The company was even more wonderful. There is great emphasis on relationships here. The pace is slower, people genuinely care for one another. We have enjoyed getting to know everyone - communication problems in all!

We even had gifts to share with the staff. Most of them are barely managing to feed their own families. They live in homes much like those described. One family was thrilled with 2 bath towels since their family of 5 was sharing the only 2 they had. Their young children were happy with markers and coloring books, candy and nail polish. It was exciting to give away extra clothes too.

We left Honduras to journey home on Saturday, September 23. The 18 hour trip home was time to reflect. My heart was so full. Full of love for these wonderful people. Full of love for their beautiful country and for their strong faith in spite of their conditions. Full of love for the beautiful children and the joy they see in every day. It seems so simple too. "Live simply, so others can simply live" a friend shared with me just the other day.

I do know God will use this experience, this journey, to continue to serve others and to perhaps raise awareness in others. The eyes of my heart have been forever opened and I know that I will never be the same. My cup of compassion is overflowing. I sense this is simply the beginning of much more to come. I want to be open to whatever God puts before me. I want to appreciate the tremendous grace and mercy He has poured out on me. And I want to thank God for the opportunity to travel this road with Nick. And most certainly my heart is full of love and appreciation for my husband Tim. Without his encouragement and support I would never have had the courage to attempt such a journey.

My heart is full also of gratitude and thanksgiving for you. Without your prayers and support, this would not have been possible. All the work and all the lives we touched in just the tiniest ways is because of you and the belief we share that we are all God's children. Your support and prayers have been deeply felt and appreciated.

Thank you and may God richly bless you,