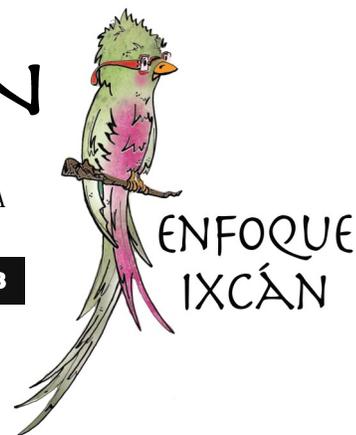


# FOCUSING ON THE IXCÁN

EYE CARE AND EYE HEALTH EDUCATION FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE IXCÁN REGION OF GUATEMALA



Volume 14 Issue 1

Spring 2018

## SPOTLIGHT ON MIGUEL ITZEP

By Scott Pike

This is Miguel Itzep, from Los Valles, Ixcán, Guatemala. Miguel came to see me when I was in Ixcán in August. His visit was to ask me to tell you how grateful he is. He told me I could use his name and photo, because, **“I want to thank the people who donate to Enfoque Ixcán for providing the money for my cataract surgery.”**

He has 5 children and 8 grandchildren. He is a proud grandfather. Miguel is a farmer. He grows corn, beans and other vegetables to feed his family. He also grows cardamom, a spice, to sell at the market. This is his life and his living. It isn't easy work. Everything is done by hand, all the planting, weeding, and harvesting. **At age 68, his work is more difficult, but he must continue.** He has no pension, 401K or retirement money. He has his land and his family.

His land and village are 1 ½ to 2 hours from the nearest town with services, like stores, health care and banks. Without Enfoque Ixcán, for Miguel to travel to professional eye care, it would be another 4 hours on public transportation. Most Ixcán residents, like Miguel, cannot afford the time away from their farms or the expense to travel and pay for eye care.

### THE POVERTY AND REMOTENESS OF IXCÁN PREVENT IT FROM HAVING PROFESSIONAL EYE CARE.

As with people everywhere, old age brings on cataracts, and blindness if not treated. Four years ago, Miguel's farming became difficult and dangerous due to his failing eyesight. Missteps, falls and accidents were threatening his ability to farm. Fortunately, Enfoque Ixcán provided the opportunity for him to have the surgery needed to restore his vision in his right eye last summer. He's hoping this year he can have the left eye corrected.

His surgery on his right eye was paid for by donors, like you. Because Enfoque Ixcán can take Miguel to a special eye clinic, a single cataract surgery costs only \$125.



Patients awaiting testing—February 2018

Miguel can now work with more confidence and enjoys being able to see his family. He told me, **“My quality of life has really improved. Thank you.”**



Miguel Itzep

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## Man with a Plan—the guy behind it all!

By Joene Pike

My husband Scott and I met in 1998, just before one of his early trips to Guatemala. He told me all about his eye care mission and the next year I accompanied him there. It was a pretty rugged 14-hour trip to Ixcán then, but I was so impressed with Scott's courage in starting the program and his inherent kindness to all the villagers, that although I was already "hooked" on this guy, this trip cemented my feelings for him.



When we met, Scott had travelled to Guatemala only 2 times. The first time was in 1996, with a friend where they travelled to the village of Santa Maria Tzeja in Ixcán where Scott met Pedro, a health promoter. Pedro indicated he would have to quit his job because, at 44 years old, he could no longer read the tiny print on medicine bottles. Right then, Scott was struck with the idea that he could be the solution to Pedro's vision issue. He also realized that this was most likely a problem for others in this village of 1,000 people.

The year following his initial visit, equipped with only a few words of Spanish, an English/Spanish dictionary and some glasses, Scott flew to Guatemala City, took a bus as close as he could get to Ixcán and then hopped on a single engine, 2-seater airplane to reach Ixcán. When he and Pedro met, Scott asked, through a translator, if Pedro would be interested in learning about eye care so he could assist others in his village with their vision problems. Despite the communication barrier, Pedro understood and agreed to become the first vision care health promoter in the entire Ixcán region of 100,000 people. Scott provided Pedro with glasses to improve his vision, allowing him to continue his health promoter work in his village.

Enfoque Ixcán (EI) was "born" in 1997 and became a non-profit in the US in 2006 and in Guatemala in 2016. After 39 visits over 22 years, the project has expanded to cover the Ixcán region with 4 trained eye care promoters. There is a small rented office to provide exams. Eye surgery patients are accompanied to a town a 5-hour bus ride away, where surgeries are performed by doctors from the Guatemala City based clinic, Visualiza. Providing eye surgeries for the poor at a reduced price, Visualiza has become an irreplaceable professional resource partner for Enfoque Ixcán.

Other partnering connections have been established in Guatemala with Rotary Clubs, the Ministry of Health, Guatemalan optometrist Rolando Cabrera, and educators in Ixcán. In June 2016, the Ixcán Municipal government donated a piece of land on which to build a clinic, with the current plan of breaking ground in February 2019.

On the U.S. side, the Pacific University Amigos Eye Care optometry students have accompanied Scott to the Ixcán 15 times to provide exams in over 20 villages throughout the region. 8,000 glasses have been dispensed and 611 eye surgeries have been funded by our generous donors. Optometrist, Dr Brian Arvidson from the Enfoque Ixcán board of directors has accompanied Scott on 10 of the mission trips. I've been privileged to accompany Scott on 20 trips.

EI is a respected, well established program in the Ixcán. I'm a lucky gal to have found and married such a kind, caring and motivated guy. What a huge accomplishment my hero, my husband has accomplished since his original "ah ha" moment in 1996.

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**THANK YOU!**  
**You're all Stars,**  
**in our Eyes!**



**A Few Words .....from Our Incredible Donors**

- ◆ "I give to Enfoque Ixcán because I know you, I trust you and I know where my money is going." -- Oregon
- ◆ "Hey, Scott. This is an awesome newsletter. I congratulate you on this well-conceived program that has evolved beyond what you and anyone else could have imagined!" -- Massachusetts
- ◆ "I appreciate the invitation to participate with a donation and applaud the work you and your organization are doing." -- North Dakota
- ◆ "Dear Scott and all at Enfoque Ixcán, the news about the eye clinic is so exciting. I love the ways El continues to grow and offer such amazing services to people in Ixcán." -- South Carolina
- ◆ "I'm happy to support the work you and your organization are doing in Guatemala. I was impressed with your mission of creating a sustainable eye care program based on local resources rather than the short-term medical mission model." -- Colorado



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**A SPRINT TO THE FINISH**

*By Scott Pike*

You may remember that 4 years ago Enfoque Ixcán raised money to build a clinic. Many of you donated to that effort. We were originally going to build next to the new hospital. Due to political corruption the new hospital remains half completed with no work in progress. It's been a long slow process.

So, we asked the municipal government to donate a piece of land for our clinic. They generously gave us half an acre on the edge of town. This added to our financial needs, however, because we now must allow for water, sewage and electricity hook-ups. We also have to clear the land and add security fencing.

**We need about \$9,000 more and we're going to raise it this year, so that we can start building early in 2019.**



**\*\*Don't forget to go to Amazonsmile.com, select Enfoque Ixcán, so a percentage of each of your purchases supports EI's efforts.**

Architects from 2 Guatemalan Rotary Clubs, have volunteered to draw up the plans and coordinate the construction. The mayor of Ixcán has pledged to have our access road completed. All the ducks are lining up. Our eye health promoters excited and relieved that we are in the final stages of this project.

All we are lacking is the \$9,000! We have a pledge of \$1,000 to start this final sprint. If you can help Enfoque Ixcán with an extra donation this year, we will have a new place to call home by the summer of 2019. Any amount you can give will help us reach this goal.

You can give on line at our website, [www.enfoqueixcan.org](http://www.enfoqueixcan.org), or to avoid transactions fees you can send a check to Enfoque Ixcán, 5784 SE Lexington Dr., Hillsboro, OR 97123. **Thanks for your support.**