FOCUSING ON THE IXCÁN

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

ENFOQUE IXCÁN

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SPOTLIGHT ON MARIA AND MARCOS

by Paula Worby and Scott Pike

Maria and Marcos live in the village of Primavera, Ixcán, where they have raised 9 children. They now have 25 grandchildren! Both of them have benefitted from cataract surgeries, which your donations help fund.

Marcos had his surgeries about 2 years ago and it made a dramatic difference for him. "It has made me young, again! Like being born anew," he said. Maria smiled. "The cataracts were like looking through a dense cloud." Walking to his farm was difficult and sometimes dangerous. Marcos grows corn, cardamom, beans and fruit trees. Before the surgeries, working on his farm became difficult as his eye sight diminished. His crops often went unattended because his children weren't always able to help him.

Primavera is about 5 hours from the nearest eye doctor. Initially, Marcos looked into having surgery at a private office, but the cost was about $2,500. This is more than the average family makes in a year in Ixcán. A friend told him about Enfoque Ixcán, so he went to our office and talked to our eye health promoter. That is what opened the door to the surgery that has been so transformational for him. His out of pocket cost for food and travel after EI donated the surgery, was only $60!

Maria has had cataract surgery on one eye, about 3 months ago, and will be having the other eye operated on this year. She is being careful around the home while the first eye is healing, but she is feeling the benefits of having one "clear" eye. Life is easier, safer and she's able to get more done around the house, now. Because Marcos had gone before her, she had no worries about making the trip for her surgery.

Maria and Marcos

The residents of Primavera endured particular hardships during Guatemala's civil war in the 1980's. They were part of the "civilian population in resistance" or CPR. In the early 80's when the violence became severe, some of the people fled to the safety of Mexico and some remained in villages and suffered under the control of the military. The CPR communities survived 12 years by hiding in the Ixcán jungle while being pursued and harassed by the army that sought to **(*Cont'd p .3*)**

In This Issue

- Spotlight on Maria and Marcos
- We Honor Our 2019 Donors
- What a Privilege
- Become a Sustainer

Contact Us

ENFOQUE IXCÁN
5784 SE Lexington Dr
Hillsboro, OR 97123
503.277.9711
EnfoqueIxcan@aol.com

Visit us on the web at
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MARIA AND MARCOS ***(cont'd from p. 1)***

capture Guatemala´s internal refugees in order to place them in militarized settings to be "reeducated."

As the Guatemala peace process took shape in the 1990s, the Catholic Church helped finance the purchase of the land for resettlement of this displaced group to form what is now Primavera, Ixcán. Maria and Marcos are thus part of a dynamic and creative community marked by deep solidarity and collective action over many decades.

With the experience of 12 years living on the run, in the jungle, you can see that Maria and Marcos have lived a tough life. They are survivors. Since their cataract surgeries, they have been able to resume the quality of their former lives. Their children and grandchildren are pleased. "We can't thank Enfoque Ixcán enough." Thanks to you, our donors, for making this kind of happy ending possible.

WHAT A PRIVILEGE! *by Scott Pike*

It was about 8 a.m. and we had just finished breakfast at the home of an Ixcán family. They served us scrambled eggs, beans and tortillas. This is a subsistence farm family whose house has a dirt floor, boards for walls and a thatched roof. The table and chairs rock a little on the uneven floor.

After eating, the family joined us for conversation. One of our group of six was our interpreter. We talked about life in the Ixcán, how the kids liked school, how the crops were doing and a little about the history of their village.

In 1982 the military came through, burned all the houses and crops, killed the animals and tried to round up all the people. Most escaped to the jungle and hid. Some eventually turned themselves in to the military, others stayed in the jungle for years or fled to Mexico. Seventeen villagers were killed by the soldiers. Those that fled didn't return until 1994.

The father in the family told us how hard it was to make a living and keep the children fed and in school. After a bit the mother, who had been very quiet, started talking. She recalled during the '80's that her father had been taken by the military and her mother had to care for the family on her own. **(cont'd p. 4)**

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WHAT A PRIVILEGE! ***(cont'd from p. 3)***

They were always hungry and struggled to survive. Then she started fighting back some tears as she told us she was worried now that if something happened to her husband, she and the children would be alone. It would be like the days when she was a child and her father was gone. She was truly frightened.

As we all fought back the tears, I suddenly had the strange feeling of being very privileged to be in this home, to hear their story and to share some of their feelings. That they would trust us enough to expose these raw emotions was very humbling. That day I learned a valuable lesson about privilege; mine, for the privileged circumstances of my birth and life, and the privilege of sharing an emotional connection with those less fortunate.

BECOME A SUSTAINER *(Note: Guatemala clinic closed due to virus; employees still get paid)*

We'd like to take a few moments to ask you to become a monthly donor. If you usually send a one-time gift each year, please consider dividing that gift by 12 and make a donation each month. Instead of one big hit to your pocketbook at the end of the year, use the convenience of automatic, monthly giving. It's easier for you and it gives Enfoque Ixcán a steady stream of support, which leads to better budgeting and more help with year-round programs. Go to the Support Us page on our website and click the "monthly giving" button to set up your year's giving plan. It's easier for you and better for us. *THANKS!*