FOCUSING ON THE IXCÁN

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

Volume 18 Issue 2 | Summer 2022

MANUEL CANIL AT 80

by Scott Pike

It's very satisfying to know you have helped restore someone's vision by contributing to their cataract surgery. Many of you have made donations to Enfoque Ixcán which has done just that. You know the feeling!

The benefits of cataract surgeries are long lasting. It's reassuring to check with a patient years later to see how his or her life has changed because of restored vision. With this in mind, I was able to attend the 80th birthday celebration for one of our former surgery patients, Manuel Canil. For several minutes, in the yard at his home, Manuel captivated his audience of friends and family by recalling some of the memorable times in his life. When he was 12 years old he lived in the highlands, over the mountains south of Ixcán. This is when he was taken away from his family to work On a plantation near the south coast. He characterized this as a time when he Worked as a slave to the plantation owner.

In the late 60's, with the help of a Spanish priest, Manuels' family, along with several others from his community, formed a co-operative. They were able to get loans to purchase the land, sight unseen, where they now live in Ixcán. Moving there was a major challenge. They had to walk for a week over the mountains, on unknown jungle paths, with all their belongings on their backs. "We almost couldn't take it any more with the knee deep mud and plagues of insects," Manuel said. Although difficult, the trip led them to a freedom they had previously only dreamed of.

Ten years later the Guatemalan military invaded Ixcán, burning villages and killing people and animals, in their efforts to stop the rebel movement which was seeking land reform and indigenous rights. As a result, several members of Manuel's family were massacred by the soldiers. The rest of his family and thousands of others fled to Mexico for 12 years.

Finally, able to return to their land in 1994, Manuel and his neighbors restarted the community building process. Manuel has been a village leader ever since. This was threatened when he began to lose his eyesight due to cataracts.

I've seen many people in Ixcán, blind from cataracts, live compromised lives. Unable to read, walk or take care of themselves, they become totally dependent on friends and family for life's necessities. They often lose purpose in life. Without purpose and quality, life can quickly slip away.

Continued on page 2

In This Issue

- Manuel Canil at 80
- Life in Ixcán
- Donor Involvement
- Amigos Newsletter Excerpt
- A Unique Adventure

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Manuel at 80!

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Manuel Canil at 80...Cont'd from page 1

As Manuel told us his story, it made me very happy to know that because of his cataract surgeries, at age 73, he continues to live an active, independent life as a respected member of his community. ***Thank you donors*** for playing a restorative part in the lives of Manuel and his Ixcán neighbors.

LIFE IN IXCÁN *by Scott Pike*

Juan with his van

People in Ixcán impress me. In spite of difficult living conditions, they are happy, kind, resourceful and hard-working. In June, when we were there, my wife and I had the privilege of traveling in a van owned and operated by Juan Lux [pronounced, Loosh]. I've known Juan for many years, but this was the first time I had a chance to visit with him and hear some of his story.

Juan has been driving a bus in his village for 25 years. His route is a 15-mile run to the main trading town of Playa Grande and back again, usually twice a day, 7 days a week. I'll let you do the math! On a common, paved road that might take 20 minutes. But, this road is anything but common, unless you live in Ixcán. It's a dirt and gravel path over steep hills with sharp turns, which becomes very muddy and slippery when it rains. And, it rains a lot in Ixcán. The trip to Playa Grande takes from 45 minutes to over an hour and can be punctuated by flat tires, broken springs and nearly impassable mud holes and ruts.

The road on a good day!

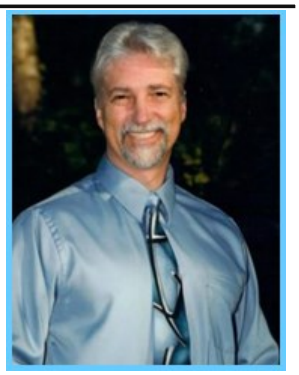
The people of his village count on him to transport them to doctors, the bank, to get crops to market and to bring life's necessities back home. I once watched Juan lift an 80-pound bag of rice to his shoulders, carry it up the ladder to the vans' roof top rack, then go to the side door to help an elderly woman to her seat. Juan has to buy a new van about every three years because the suspension systems wear out. Three years is just about how long it takes to raise the money for a new van. He bought his first van with money saved by working in the U.S. and Mexico. As a teenager he scraped together the money needed to hire a coyote and he went north to the U.S. For 10 years he worked in California and Cancun, Mexico as a bartender, waiter and bell boy.

Like most migrants who sneak across our Southern border, Juan did it because of a lack of opportunity in his country and as a way to send money back to his impoverished family. It was a way to get a step ahead of abject poverty so he could return to his family and start a business. Juan made the dream work.

At age 54 he has 6 children ages from 26 to 3, so he can't retire yet. He works hard to make sure his children can have an education and opportunities to make their lives successful without having to make the dangerous trip to the U.S.

As we made a second effort to climb a muddy, rutted section of road in the early light of dawn, Juan found traction and gave a little smile as we lurched and crested the hill. The passengers hardly noticed the delay. Juan has their trust. After 25 years of getting them to town, most of them slept right through it. Juan Lux is a good example of the resilient spirit and dedication to family and community which has so impressed me about the people of Ixcán. He inspires me to continue serving the eye care needs of Ixcán, Guatemala.

DONOR INVOLVEMENT SPOTLIGHT



Craig

A unique form of donor involvement is personal in-kind support. We've had a big increase in productivity due to the ingenuity of Dr. Craig Bowen who developed a software program which is installed on our clinic computer in Ixcán. Dr. Bowen's software is tailored to the needs of our situation in Ixcán and allows us to organize our records for patient demographics, keep track of our exam outcomes and the treatments provided to patients. Now, our patient records are readily available with a few key strokes and we can pull up reports very easily. Dr. Bowen is an optometrist in private practice in Tualatin, Oregon.

2022 AMIGOS NEWSLETTER EXCERPT

by Mary Avisado, Pacific University Amigos president & EI representative

Enfoque Ixcán (EI) and Amigos Eye Care have a long history of working productively and collaboratively together in Guatemala. In January 2022, EI and Amigos entered into a formal partnership. EI has been supporting and building the eye care services in the Ixcán region of Guatemala for nearly 25 years. In 2006, EI officially became a non-profit with the mission to ensure that the people of the Ixcán region of Guatemala have access to vision and eye health care and eye health education. One of EI's key partners in providing expanded eye care services in Guatemala has been Amigos Eye Care. Beyond being an active partner with EI, Amigos has served thousands of patients across the globe. Since 1975, AMIGOS has completed 150 mission trips to 20 countries, 17 of those trips have been to Guatemala. Both of the organizations will partner together to support each other and serve the Ixcán region in their respective ways to help build more sustainable eye care within Guatemala. EI maximizes the use of local and regional resources and builds capacity and expertise among the population in order to empower local communities. While EI is the main source of patient care for the people of the Ixcán region, Amigos Eye Care will offer a variety of resources to help build the mission of the organization. Our next scheduled collaborative trip is scheduled for August 2022.

"The underlying philosophy of Enfoque Ixcán is that the most appropriate help we have to offer is to train local people to help themselves. Our goal is to provide the training and resources which empower local health promoters and Guatemalan doctors to treat and care for their neighbors. It is our belief that improved vision and eye care substantially increase one's dignity and quality of life." – Dr. Scott Pike

A UNIQUE ADVENTURE

by Joene Pike

Our eye health promoters (minus Pedro)

Although we have fairly "luxurious" quarters in the guest house in the village of Santa Maria Tzeja compared to how the villagers live, we discovered how interestingly difficult the situation can be when one is ill. On our June trip after a day of training and meetings with our eye health promoters, Scott tested positive for Covid and I tested positive 2 days later, which ended our ability to complete the items on our list of "to do's".

The guest house where we stay, with our delegation members from Massachusetts, contains 5 small bare bones bedrooms and one office. There is an entry gate/door and then a long hallway in the middle of the building with a sink and stove at the far end. Our room was situated nearest the sink/stove area. To use the bathroom, one has to go down the hallway, outside to a path and down a short set of stairs. Consequently, isolation was limited, but we did mask up every time "nature" called.

Continued on page 4

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A Unique Adventure … Cont'd from page 3

Per CDC guidelines, we spent the first 5 days, after testing positive, in the bedroom away from other with the exception of breaks outside when no on was around to potentially get infected. The weather was mostly in the 80's-90's with 90% humidity, not a particularly pleasant isolation experience.

The saving grace was that our fellow travelers kindly brought us our home cooked meals from their daily family dining visits in the village.

Once we were past the 5 days of isolation (again per CDC) we were able to mask up and get on a van and then a bus to go back to Guatemala City where we able to continue to somewhat isolate and recover from our mild cold like symptoms.

The guest house

amazonsmile

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

Thankfully, we were past the 10-day isolation and masking periods when we got on the plane (still masking) to head home and sleep off our lingering tiredness from the trip and Covid. One never knows what experiences lie in wait when one travels. This was one that tried our patience a bit but showed how others' (the villagers and delegation members) kindness and caring could make even a minor illness less trying.