

# FOCUSING ON IXCÁN

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

VOLUME 19 ISSUE 1

Spring 2023

## FLIGHT 45 BY DR. SCOTT PIKE

In February on my 45<sup>th</sup> trip to Guatemala I found that my tolerance for these international flights is waning. This could be a result of advancing age, or it could be my frustration at never quite understanding the customs forms for Guatemala and worrying that if I get it wrong, they won't let me in. Somehow, I must get it right, since they haven't thrown me out yet.

However, the energy and passion for the work of Enfoque Ixcán remains high. Helping people in serious need of eye care and empowering our eye health promoters with usable and important skills so that they can better serve their communities with effective and appropriate eye care continues to be of prime importance.

As a result, our patients and our eye health promoters lead more productive lives, with increased dignity, self-confidence and quality of life. We see these changes:

- in children who perform better in school,
- in improved community involvement for adults wearing simple reading glasses,



Bartolo Reyes 2023

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## A LACK OF ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Usually the stories we write for the newsletters are about people regaining their sight after a cataract surgery or being treated after a serious eye injury or some other life changing eye related occurrence. But the truth is most of the patients we treat in Ixcán, Guatemala have smaller problems. Some need reading glasses or glasses to see the whiteboard at school, some need lubricating eye drops to find relief from dry eye problems. Most of the men work outside in the dust, wind and hot sun. Most of the women work in the home, cooking over a smoky wood fire.

In the USA these may seem like minor problems. We run to the drug store for eye drops. We get our eyes checked regularly for glasses. If we have an injury, we can drop in at a nearby urgent care. Access to care is readily available.

But, for the people of Ixcán life isn't so simple. There is no well stocked nearby drugstore to buy eye drops or alcohol wipes to clean a wound. Urgent care offices don't exist. The nearest doctor or emergency room may be 2 hours away. But most folks don't have a car to get there, and the village bus runs on a set schedule, not according to a person's needs.

Also, due to lack of health education, many people don't understand the severity of an eye problem or possible treatment options.

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# THANK YOU

Your gifts make Enfoque Ixcán's work in Guatemala possible now and into the future.  
We appreciate all you do for the people of the Ixcán region of Guatemala.

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WELCOMES  
ANNA WISDOM

As part of the partnership Enfoque Ixcán has with Amigos Eye Care at Pacific University College of Optometry, the current president of Amigos is invited to be a member of the EL board of directors. This year we are happy to welcome Anna Wisdom to join us.

Anna is a graduate student at Pacific University College of Optometry in Forest Grove, OR. She is the current President of AMIGOS Eye Care, a non-profit student organization at Pacific University and partner of Enfoque Ixcán.

She grew up in Woodinville, WA and received her BS in biology from the University of Washington.

Anna is passionate about providing eye care to underprivileged communities locally and globally. In her free time she enjoys exploring the Pacific Northwest's beautiful hikes, playing card games, and baking sourdough bread.

We're delighted to have you with us Anna.

## FLIGHT 45 CONTINUED

- in longer, healthier lives after sight restoring cataract surgeries,
- in improved quality of lives after receiving prosthetic eyes, and
- in a life saved by an eye examination diagnosing a brain tumor.

Enfoque Ixcán has had all these successes and more.

**In 2022 you, our donors, funded 96 eye surgeries! You have now funded 985 eye surgeries since our beginning, which includes 728 sight restoring cataract surgeries.**

In February I was able to visit with a couple of our past patients to see how they're doing now. In the Summer 2009 edition of this newsletter, I wrote a story about Bartolo Reyes. He had recently had cataract surgeries on both eyes and he used 2 words to explain the difference it had made in his life "safety and confidence."

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## A LACK OF ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE CONTINUED

*Do they need a doctor, a nurse, a neighbor, a hospital or will their problem resolve itself?*

As an example, on the last day of our time with the people of Ixcán, a woman came looking for me at the guest house where we were staying. Accompanied by her daughter, both dressed in their traditional colorful blouses and skirts, Maria Perez Rolios had a swollen left upper eyelid. It was uncomfortable and tender to touch and had started 5 days before.

I did some questioning and a little probing and decided her condition was a sty, something almost everyone has had in their life.

Maria had gone to the village health post and received antibiotic drops. The drops gave her more comfort, but the swelling persisted. I assured her that the problem wasn't serious and the drops will help combat the infection. But, there was something else she could do to resolve the problem. Heat. Treatment with warm compresses 3-4 times a day for a week, or until it was better, should take care of it.

In Maria's village there was no running water in the homes, making it difficult to keep things clean. With the ever present dust, it's hard to avoid an occasional plugged and infected tear gland, and a resulting sty.

In our world, a sty is easily dealt with, but for Maria it was a new condition which she had no knowledge of. I took the time to explain her condition, its cause and the treatment. She left relieved, and by now I'm sure her eyelid is better.

What's common and easily understood and treated in our country can be a mystery where there is limited access to health care. Enfoque Ixcán is making a difference, patient by patient.



Maria Perez Rolios and her daughter



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**FLIGHT 45 CONTINUED**

For a man of 77 years those are important concerns, especially when he had to walk on rutted dirt and mud paths to move around in his village. The safety and confidence better vision gave Bartolo paid off. He turns 93 years old this April and remains healthy and active. I visited with him after church. He told me he still sees well and does a lot of reading. In 2009, Bartolo became my “posture role model.” He still stands tall today. Had he gone blind from untreated cataract back then, I wonder if a loss of purpose and confidence might not have shortened his life. He still enjoys his family and has much to live for.

Another patient, who is alive today because of an eye exam with Enfoque Ixcán, is Maria Elena. If you’ve read past newsletters (summer 2016), you may recall that she was experiencing suddenly declining vision. The cause was an aggressive brain tumor. Two weeks after our referral to the doctors in Guatemala City, she had a successful brain surgery. The tumor wasn’t found soon enough to save all of her vision (she’s now legally blind), but it did save her life. Maria Elena had to quit her job as a very popular math teacher.

She now stays at home caring for her husband and children. While low vision makes it more challenging for her to read and move about, she does well and prides herself in the beautiful flowers she’s planted in their yard. She still has a purpose and brings joy to the world.

**These are the kinds of changes you make with your support of Enfoque Ixcán. These are the results your donations provide. This is what keeps me passionate about our mission. ~ Scott**



Maria Elena with her husband, daughter and beautiful flowers