FOCUSING ON IXCÁN

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

VOLUME 20 ISSUE 1 **Spring 2024**

THINGS ARE GOING WELL IN IXCÁN

by Scott Pike

Joene and I just got home from another busy and successful trip to Guatemala. Almost like clockwork, we arrived at the Enfoque Ixcán clinic at the same time as an emergency patient. In fact, he was there waiting for us.

Mario had come from 3 hours away to seek care for his injured eye. One look was all it took to see the injury to his right cornea. He had been working in the fields (without eye protection) when a chip from a rock struck him. His eye was moderately red with a little mucus oozing from the corner. He was uncomfortable and light sensitive.

Mario's eye injury

Of course, as with many emergencies, this was a Friday afternoon. We needed to get Mario to an ophthalmologist as quickly as possible. Our partner ophthalmology hospital, Visualiza, was 6 hours away on public transportation. A few phone calls assured us and the patient that if he could get to Visualiza by the next morning, the ophthalmologist would be able to see him. We gave Mario and his dad antibiotic eye drops and directions to find the hospital and told them which buses to catch, and off they went.

I'm not sure of the outcome. My guess is that Mario will have some permanent vision loss in that eye. However, if Enfoque Ixcán wasn't there for him to get him directed to proper care, he might have lost the eye altogether from infection. Access to eye care is part of our mission statement. A service we take very seriously.

On this trip we were part of a delegation from Needham, MA. That involved staying in the village of Santa Maria Tzeja, having meals with local families, attending community meetings and hanging out with the local residents. Getting to know the people is the best part of these trips for me.

Mayor Roberto Sub and Scott in the mayor's office.

I have always made it a point to visit the Ixcán mayor at least once a year. The municipality gave us the land we built our clinic on, so I like to keep the mayor informed of our work and continue to thank him.

This year Ixcán has a new mayor, Roberto Sub. He's the 4th mayor we've done business with over the last 12 years and possibly the most cordial to us. Our eye health promoters, our interpreter, Catherine, and Joene and I spent an hour in his office one morning. He had lots of important questions about our organization and concluded

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SCAN ME

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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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You are all STARS in our Eyes

EI BOARD OF DIRECTORS WELCOMES CLAUDIA SOLOMON

Enfoque Ixcán welcomes Claudia Solomon as it's Amigos Eye Care representative for 2024

Claudia Solomon is a first generation college student at Pacific University's College of Optometry in Forest Grove, OR. She is the current President of AMIGOS Eye Care, a non-profit organization at Pacific University and partner of Enfoque Ixcán. Through her role as President, Claudia is committed to providing quality and accessible eye care to underprivileged communities both locally and internationally.

Outside of school and volunteer work, Claudia loves going to concerts, finding new coffee shops, and sings in her church choir.

Welcome, Claudia!

Continued from page 1

that he'd like to see our clinic. We made arrangements for him to visit the clinic the next day.

When Roberto showed up (we were betting on whether he really would), he was followed by an entourage of 12 people from his office (2 were photographers). All the mayor's movements were live on the municipalities' Facebook page. After touring our clinic and looking over the grounds, he presented us with 2 palm trees and 4 flowering bushes. This was a very pleasant surprise. I'm looking forward to continued rewarding relations with the mayor.

Scott and Joene with the mayor and some of the plants he brought for the clinic.

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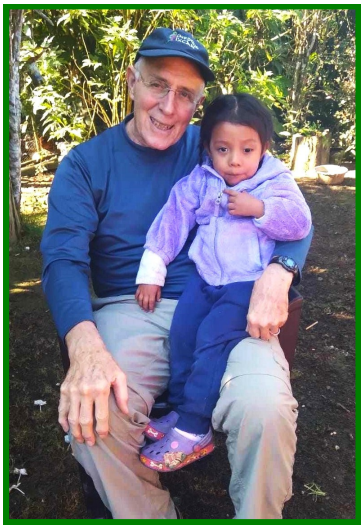
KARLA *by Joene Pike*

We had such a productive and positive trip to Ixcán in February. One of the events that occurred touched my heart. We were at a home in Santa Maria Tzeja having a meal with a local family. I was immediately enamored of a 3-year-old little girl, Karla, who was gently carrying a tiny kitten. Her sweet, gentleness impressed me. While talking to her mother, we learned that Karla's dad is Alberto, who as a young boy, used to escort us to the local waterfall where we could cool off from the oppressive heat. What a fun coincidence. As we conversed, we noticed that Karla's left eye was pointing a bit upward and not tracking normally. Scott did a quick exam and realized she had a cataract in that eye. Since she had no vision in that eye, it potentially explained her upturned eye. Scott spoke to Karla's mom and suggested she take Karla to Visualiza, our partner clinic, 6 hours away or to their Guatemala City clinic for a thorough examination. She decided to take Karla to the city, as they have family there. Due to Karla's young age, Visualiza, who performs eye surgeries for EI, may do the needed surgery for free. At this time, it appears they will make the trip to Guatemala City later in March so hopefully we will have an update about her outcome soon. Our hope is that she is young enough that she may have restored sight after the surgery.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THE TRUE VALUE OF CATARACT SURGERY

by Scott Pike

We pay about $250 to fund a cataract surgery. That's a damn good value, don't you think? Read Elisao's story and find out what it's really worth.

Eliaso is a 59 year old farmer from the town of Barillas, about a 3 hour drive from the Enfoque Ixcán clinic, his closest access to eye care. He has lived in Barillas since he was 12 years old and has a big family with 8 children and now, 4 grandchildren.

When his vision began to decline, it became hard for him to read, to see the faces of friends and family. He felt like his world was closing in on him.

Our eye health promoters took him to Visualiza for cataract surgery last November. I met him in February to hear his story. Before the surgery he said, "Everything was a total blur." Here's a list of things he said about his vision since the surgery:

* "I'm a religious man, so being able to read the Bible again is a joy"

* "Now I can see the stars!"

* "I can see a chicken, and even its shadow, at 200 meters and people's faces at 100 meters."

He finished his list by telling me how much he enjoyed looking at the moon.

$250 is a small price to pay for these valuable 'little gems' that make life worth living.